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OPENING THE DOOR GENTLY, HIS HEART WELL-NIGH STOOD STILL AT THE SIGHT HE BEHELD.

A DAUGHTER'S DEVOTION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

Across London Bridge, going with the tide that flows citywards in the morning to ebb away from it again late in the afternoon. Fresh young faces, bland, well-to-do, middle-aged ones, hawk-eyed, thin-lipped, elderly visages, sleek prosperity, and gaunt poverty elbowing each other on the bridge, all going citywards, all more or less actuated by the greed of gold.

This human tide, so restless, so unceasing, carrying, perchance, far darker, stranger, sadder secrets in its breast than the swift flowing waters beneath, was full of attraction for a young fellow standing upon the famous bridge for the first time, in the fresh morning sunlight.

Vailee in hand, Will Meredith looked keenly around him, pausing for a moment in one of the recesses much frequented by idlers. The atmosphere was clear, the sky overhead blue; the river, with its long perspective of wharves and warehouses, had a certain beauty of its own not to be ignored. Grimey London had for once washed her face and assumed a smiling aspect.

A delicious sense of expansion and new life came to the young man with this, his first view of London. The vastness of the great city, its mighty teeming life, and well-nigh boundless resources came home to him with a force and intensity that thrilled him with exultant feeling, and set his heart beating rapidly.

Would the modern Babylon prove kind and favourable to him or the reverse? Having reached it, would he be permitted to win either fame or fortune, to realize the ambitious dreams so long cherished within his heart?

Will Meredith was tall and slim, with crisp brown hair waving round a well-shaped head, clear dark brown eyes, at once dreamy and per-

ceptive in expression, regular features, and a remote, handsome mouth, scarcely concealed by the silky moustache he wore.

The only son of a provincial artist, Will Meredith had inherited a double portion of his father's talent. Upon the death of the latter Will had resolved to come to London and fight his way to the front, if possible. Instead of remaining in the provinces, where no congenial society, no atmosphere of art, stimulated and encouraged the aspiring student.

A friend had secured lodgings for him with the use of a studio in the vicinity of West Kensington. An artist whose house was too large for him, who, in other words, lacked money, had consented to receive Will Meredith beneath his roof on very moderate terms, and it was towards this gentleman's residence that he was making his way from London Bridge Station.

A legacy of seventy pounds a year, bequeathed to him by a maiden aunt, imparted a certain amount of confidence to the art-student. With that to fall back upon he was in no danger of

actual want, should success at first refuse to be wood and won by him.

He walked on rapidly for some distance, amused and interested by all that he saw and heard going on around him. Then, beckoning to the driver of a crawling hansom, he was driven through the crowded thoroughfares towards his new residence in West Kensington.

It proved to be a semi-detached Queen Anne villa, standing back from the road in its own well-kept garden, sufficiently picturesque in aspect to have justified an artist in making it his abode.

As he could knock and ring, the front door was opened by a little German maid, who, somehow reminded him of a Dresden china figure. She was not more than seventeen, with big blue eyes, a fine clear skin, pouting baby lips, a little round chin with a dimple in it, and soft brown hair surmounted by a big white cap edged with lace.

Gretchen's face was wreathed in smiles as she nodded her top-heavy cap at Will Meredith in answer to his inquiry.

"Yes, this is Mr. Neville's house," she said. "Please to come in, sir. We have been expecting you. The ladies are in the drawing-room."

After informing her that his luggage would arrive later on, Will Meredith followed Gretchen into the pretty flower-scented drawing-room. It was vacant, however, save for a magnificent collie, which rose and approached the new-comer in friendly, inquiring fashion. Gretchen darted away, and he could hear her calling in shrill, yet subdued tones,—

"Mam'selle, Mam'selle, come down! It is the new young gentleman, and there is no one in the drawing-room to receive him. I cannot find Miss Mavis anywhere."

Stifling a laugh the "new young gentleman" turned to greet a lady who entered the room at that moment, having run downstairs in hot haste in response to Gretchen's summons—a plump little Frenchwoman of thirty, with small, regular features, bright brown eyes, and smooth, glossy, dark brown hair.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith! But I must apologise for there being no one here to welcome you on your arrival," she said, brightly, extending a plump white hand to him. "My brother-in-law is in the studio, and my niece must have gone out. I am so sorry."

"Not at all," rejoined Will Meredith with a smile.

He had an idea that he should get on very well with this frank, lively little Frenchwoman.

"I hope to be with you *en famille*. You will kindly dispense with all formality, so far as I am concerned."

"*T'es bien*," said Mam'selle, her keen bright glance resting approvingly upon the young fellow. "We are honest people, and it will be a relief to find you willing to adapt yourself to our ways, while you will prove a welcome addition to our small family circle. Here is my brother-in-law, Sydney, let me introduce you to Mr. Meredith."

A big, handsome man, still on the right side of forty, came forward and shook hands cordially with the young artist, who thought he had seldom beheld a finer and more imposing physique than that of his new host.

Sydney Neville had preserved his good looks intact. His dark hair still waved abundantly over his broad white brow; his large eloquent eyes had lost none of their youthful fire; his features were mobile and expressive; his manner full of *bonhomie*.

A large, generous, noble physique, indicative of a gifted, ample nature, keenly alive to pleasurable influences and social joys—a man whom everyone liked and admired, although he worked only by fits and starts, when he felt in the mood, disarming criticism by his sunny, genial manner and rare, natural gifts—the sort of man for whom a woman would cheerfully sacrifice herself to any extent, just because he was so graceless—and so charming!

"You will think ours a cosmopolitan household, Meredith," he remarked, as the two men proceeded towards the studio that Will was to share. "Gretchen is, of course, German. We brought her over with us a year ago. My sister-

in-law is French. I married a Frenchwoman, and, when my wife died, seven years ago, her sister undertook the management of my house, since Mavis, my only daughter, is hardly old enough to assume so much responsibility. We get on very well as a rule, considering our different nationalities. Now, I fancy if your easel stands in that corner you will obtain a good light. We can have the studio divided by curtains, should you prefer such an arrangement."

Will Meredith was introduced to Mavis Neville at luncheon, when she glided noiselessly into the dining-room.

"My daughter, Mavis," said the artist.

Will, glancing swiftly up, saw a slender, graceful little form clad in grey cashmere, a pale, sweet, thoughtful face; eyes like dewy violets, their dark curved lashes resting on the soft rounded cheek; a tremulous rose-bud mouth, masses of dark hair simply plaited, twining in soft rings about the pretty ears and forehead—not, strictly speaking, a lovely face, but one with an indescribable charm that grew upon those who beheld it slowly, but surely.

Mavis Neville seemed painfully shy and nervous. She said but little during the meal, and Will Meredith found his attempt at conversation in that quarter a decided failure.

"Nice little thing!" he reflected, summing her up rapidly with the cool effrontery, the confidence in his own judgment, peculiar to nineteenth century young men, who never err on the side of modesty; "but shy, awfully shy! Not much in her. Precisely like nine hundred and ninety girls of a similar age! Women are as a rule, sadly wanting in character and individuality!"

Then he gave all his attention to Sydney Neville, whose conversation—witty, animated, ranging over many topics—was always worth listening to.

Mavis disappeared when they rose from the table, and Meredith saw little more of her that day.

As he shook down amidst his new surroundings, however, and became better acquainted with each member of the household, it dawned upon him by degrees that Mam'selle, as every one called her, held the reins of office only as a sinecure. The ruling spirit of the small establishment was, in reality, Mavis.

It was she who caused the wheels of domestic life to revolve smoothly while deferring to her aunt's authority in everything.

Mam'selle could perform marvels, from cooking a savoury omelette to trimming a hat in a style calculated to drive an Englishwoman wild with envy; but she was incapable of sustained effort, of orderly, systematic work and rule. She bustled and chattered, and flew from place to place, commencing half-a-dozen things, which Mavis quietly finished.

But for the latter, meals would have been unpunctual, rooms left littered and untidy. Thanks to her efforts, supplementing Mam'selle's, all went smoothly.

Mavis had plenty of character and individuality concealed beneath that shy, gentle exterior.

As he discovered this, and began to admire and feel interested in her, Will Meredith made an effort to win the girl's confidence.

In time he succeeded in overcoming her reserve; and as she grew to regard him less as a stranger, more as a member of the family, her attitude towards the young man became more friendly and familiar.

"What a glorious morning! I think I shall treat myself to a holiday. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy; and I have had very little play lately."

Will Meredith had flung himself into an easy chair in the artist's drawing-room, where he sat, the picture of lazy enjoyment, his long legs stretched out at full length, watching Mavis Neville arrange some half-blown roses in the vases on the mantelpiece.

June sunlight was flooding the room with its warm radiance; through the open window, borne on the soft breeze, came a sound of music. All nature seemed full of rich, rejoicing life. It was a day to make the old feel young again, to set

youth longing for pleasure in some shape or form rather than work.

"I think you deserve some relaxation," said Mavis, gravely, glancing at him from beneath her long lashes. "You have worked hard ever since coming here, Mr. Meredith. Now, I should not say this to papa; he is only too glad to seize upon any pretext to escape from the studio and make holiday. He is worse than a schoolboy, but with you it is different!"

"I don't want to go alone, though," replied Will, plaintively. "That would be awfully slow work. I was about to express a wish that you, Miss Neville, and Mam'selle would accept me as your escort to Richmond. We could drive there, and go for a row on the river. It would be very jolly. I hope you will not refuse to go. I shall regard your consent in the light of a personal favour."

The deep, musical voice, the pleading accent, caused some fine chord in the girl's nature to vibrate with a swift, sweet ecstasy, akin to pain in its passionate, vague yearning. Her dark blue eyes grew suddenly radiant.

"I should like it so much!" she said, gladly. "Of course I will go if auntie is agreeable."

She flitted away in search of Mam'selle, who readily agreed to accompany her. A pleasure excursion, taken in conjunction with a nice little dinner, suited the Frenchwoman admirably.

Sydney Neville, painting industriously in the studio, raised no objection to the proposed trip to Richmond.

"Go and enjoy yourself, little one," he said, benignly, to Mavis. "I can trust Meredith to take good care of you. Youth is the time for enjoyment. Old fogies, like myself, can afford to stay at home and keep house. It is all we are fit for."

He looked so unlike an old fogey, in his splendid vigour and prime, that Mavis laughed as she kissed him, before joining the others. Mam'selle trotted downstairs, a picture of neat, compact elegance, well-gloved, well-shod, looking more like a pretty plump partridge than ever.

"Mam'selle, you are what Dickens would call 'a compact enchantress!'" exclaimed Will Meredith, laughingly, as he waited around her with hands uplifted in admiration. The two carried on a perpetual brisk fire of badinage, in which sometimes one and sometimes the other got the best of it.

"Your toilet is simply ravishing—those draperies a work of art!"

"Mauvais garçon," retorted Mam'selle, "to utter such flattery. I was but two hours yesterday throwing this skirt together. A *pouf* here, a *tuck* there. Voilà, it is done, and your English-women cannot excel it!"

"Auntie never will put in solid work, close-stitches," said Mavis, entering the room. "She is all *poufs*, and pins, and tacking-cotton. Some day, when she is caught in a high wind there will be a terrible catastrophe. She will literally fall to pieces!"

Mavis looked delicately lovely in her dress of fawn-coloured material, trimmed with knots of pale blue ribbon, and wide shadé hat to correspond with the dress. She generally chose soft, neutral tints, and they became her well. Will Meredith never forgot that day, it was so full of deep, exquisite enjoyment.

The splendid weather, the sense of dawning love in his heart for the fair girl who sat beside him, lifting her starry eyes to his now and then—eyes in whose liquid depths he could see his own happiness reflected—were all sufficient. Past and present were lost sight of in the blissful present; and Mavis, yielding to the exhilarating influences of the day, forgot to be shy and reserved.

She laughed and talked gaily as they went along; her quaint, wise sayings, demure fun, and flashes of keen insight, revealing more and more of her true character to the man who was rapidly becoming her lover.

There was such a strange blending of childlike, fresh simplicity and grave, premature wisdom about Mavis. It formed her principal charm—one that perplexed Will Meredith. He was at a loss to know how and where she had acquired her knowledge of life's sterner, sadder aspects, to

account for the shadow that occasionally crossed her face. Her home-life appeared to be sheltered, peaceful, happy. Was it possible that a skeleton lurked in the background?

Mam'selle refused to go upon the water, of which she had a profound horror. Mavis might go for an hour's row, she said, and she would stroll about the hotel grounds until the pair returned—an arrangement for which Will Meredith silently blessed her.

Once afloat he sent the boat through the water smoothly and swiftly with long, measured strokes. It was so pleasant to have Mavis there, sitting opposite to him, steering, to watch the delight in her eyes as, every now and then, he secured some fresh spoil for her in the shape of water-lilies or forget-me-nots.

"This always seems to me an apt emblem of life," he remarked meaningfully, "or rather of what life should be when two people come together 'for better, for worse.' If the bark is to glide smoothly, the man must row while the woman steers. Rowing requires strength, steering tact; thus their respective parts are duly allotted to them."

Mavis laughed and blushed.

"What a pretty idea!" she said, softly, as he handed her a dripping bunch of turquoise blossoms.

"The lovers' flower!" he remarked. "Forget-me-not. Few of us are fortunate enough to obtain what it is the emblem of, namely, the love that never dies."

"True love cannot die," murmured the girl. "It is immortal."

"I am presumptuous enough to hope that such love may fall to my share—some day," he went on. "Nothing less would satisfy me. To be content with half measures in love seems to me to imply something wrong in yourself or the object of affection."

"As you say," she assented. "True love should go all lengths, and be capable of any amount of self-sacrifice."

"I am glad we share the same sweet creed," he said, earnestly, and her eyes drooped before his, into which the lovesight had suddenly leaped.

What might have followed had not a great lumbering barge nearly run them down in passing must needs remain unrecorded.

"Clumsy brute!" exclaimed Will Meredith, wrathfully, dedoating this compliment, without permission, to the bargees, who promptly returned it with interest.

A few strokes soon placed them beyond the source of annoyance, however, but the conversation, when resumed, took a less personal turn.

The pleasant little dinner was followed by a doddling drive home through the calm, peaceful summer evening.

As soon as they reached home, Mavis, her hands full of flowers, went in quest of her father. Five minutes later she returned to the drawing-room, a look of vague terror in her eyes, of some haunting misery.

"Papa has—has been compelled to go away for several days," she faltered. "I am so sorry, I had no idea of this when we started."

CHAPTER II.

"I HOPE no member of your family has been taken ill!" replied Will Meredith, with genuine solicitude.

"Oh, no!" said Mavis. "Papa has to—take these journeys occasionally, at very short notice. I don't suppose he will be away long, however. At least, I hope not."

Somehow the artist's mysterious absence cast a gloom over the household. Gretchen went about her work looking sombre, and saying very little. Even bright, cheery Mam'selle appeared uneasy and distrustful.

Mavis wandered from room to room when she thought herself unobserved—pale, sorrowful, full of nervous apprehension. Although in his presence they strove to appear as if nothing were amiss, Will Meredith could not fail to detect the changed atmosphere, and to wonder at it.

He was sleeping soundly on the third night of Sydney Neville's absence from home, when a noise below awoke him, and he sat up in bed to listen.

He fancied that he heard the voice of Mavis raised in a perfect agony of supplication. Then, after a low, indistinct murmur of other voices, and a sound of closing doors, all became quiet again.

Springing out of bed he struck a match, and looked at his watch. It was just two o'clock. As a rule Mavis retired early. What could have happened to cause her to be about in the dead of the night?

Going down to breakfast the next morning he glanced keenly at Mavis, who sat opposite to him. The sweet face that had grown so dear to him of late looked pale and weary; but there was an expression of evident relief on it. Mam'selle, too, was her old, bright self again.

"My brother-in-law returned late last night, Mr. Meredith," she remarked, as she handed the young man his coffee. "He is somewhat fatigued this morning. I expect I shall have to send his breakfast up to him."

Will made some reply, but refrained from any embarrassing question. Ten minutes later Sydney Neville entered the breakfast-room, and greeted its occupants with his accustomed geniality.

The artist looked haggard and fatigued, as if travelling at short notice did not agree with him.

There were dark lines beneath his eyes, his hand shook like an aspen-leaf, while his high spirits and rapid flow of conversation seemed forced and spasmodic, every now and then suffering a relapse.

What struck Will Meredith most was Sydney Neville's manner towards his daughter. In addressing her his tone became more than usually tender. There was even something humble and conciliatory about it, as if he sought to make amends for some wrong committed.

The two artists worked industriously at their respective easels through the morning, Sydney Neville making only a vague, passing allusion to his recent journey.

Will Meredith went in to luncheon in a sanguine, agreeable, well satisfied frame of mind, to have it completely wrecked by the unexpected presence at that meal of Mr. Luke Tressider.

Luke Tressider was the only son of a wealthy Cornish squire, a big, broad-shouldered fellow, with a rosy, clean-shaven face, light brown hair, cropped mercilessly close, and good-humoured, but somewhat expressionless features.

He looked agreeably prosperous and wealthy. His clothes were of the most fashionable cut and style, his laugh loud and frequent.

Will Meredith, scented a rival, hated him instinctively, each little attention paid by the Cornishman to Mavis tending to increase the feeling of hatred.

A mutual friend had introduced Luke Tressider to the Nevilles some months previous, and, little as he cared for art and bright, clever Bohemian society—for anything, in fact, save athletic sports and "the fancy"—Tressider had become a frequent visitor. The West Kensington villa evidently possessed some special attraction for him.

He had been away from town lately. This was his first visit since Will Meredith's arrival.

The coolness and antipathy proved mutual, each young man inwardly resenting the other's established position.

A splendid bouquet of hothouse flowers, Luke Tressider's offering to Mavis, especially aroused Meredith's ire. If glances could wither, those delicate blossoms would have drooped and died immediately.

"If that great, brainless Cornish Idiot is coming here often, to sit and stare Mavis out of countenance, I shall feel tempted to kick him!" he reflected, viciously, on his way back to the studio, to perpetrate a very bad afternoon's work indeed.

Yet his peace of mind was fated to suffer still more by reason of the big Cornishman's frequent visits.

Will Meredith detested his society, the more

because he was not in a position openly to resent it.

Big, ruddy, good-tempered Luke Tressider, with his strident laugh, easy, self-satisfied manner, and well-filled pockets, became the young artist's *bête noire*.

Will was very sensitive on the score of his own poverty, and to see this man lavishing hothouse flowers and fruit, concert tickets, new music, and so on, upon Mavis and Mam'selle, chafed and irritated him to the verge of madness; and the head and front of the Cornishman's offending was, in Will Meredith's eyes, his marked predilection, his scarcely concealed *indulgence* for Mavis Neville.

Not that Mavis ever flirted with him. Even Meredith, rendered Argus-eyed by jealousy, could not accuse her of anything approaching coquetry when Luke Tressider was present. She laughed at his clumsy sallies and weak-kneed jokes. He seemed to afford her a deal of quiet merriment, while she accepted his attentions as a matter of course, without apparently attaching much importance to them.

Her father's friends were chiefly masculine, and from a child she had been accustomed to receive more or less homage from them all.

"Mr. Tressider has not called for two days," remarked Mam'selle, one evening when, dinner over, they were assembled in the drawing-room.

"Indeed," replied Will Meredith, sarcastically, as he ransacked a music portfolio in search of a song he wished Mavis to sing. "How can he be so cruel as to deprive us of the light of his presence for so long a period? Yet we can hardly expect, I suppose, to enjoy a monopoly of his interesting society, since he is so much in request!"

Mavis laughed.

"I think men often detest each other quite as heartily as girls are credited with doing," she said. "You are very hard upon poor Mr. Tressider. He cannot help his lack of brilliancy!"

"Rich Mr. Tressider, you mean," he replied, in the same tone, glancing swiftly at Mavis as she sat there in the fading light, a dainty little figure robed in lace and muslin, some fragrant lilies fastened in her soft, wavy, brown hair. "If Nature has left his brain somewhat empty she has kindly filled his purse, and that is an admirable substitute in the world's eyes. Moreover, since you defend him, he is doubly rich."

"Oh, I am always loyal to my friends!" laughed the girl.

"And you include him among them!"

"Why not?" she asked, demurely, as the reason of all this jealous dislike suddenly dawned upon her, filling her with mingled surprise and delight. "Papa's friends are mine, and, since you are of them, why should you complain?"

"Thanks; but I don't care to be placed on a footing with Tressider in your esteem," was the ungrateful response. "Have you ever noticed how very limited his phraseology is? It seems odd that a man, presumably well-educated, should be compelled to round off every other sentence with—that sort of thing, don't you know?"

His apt mimicry of poor Tressider's favourite phrase and tone set them all off laughing.

"How uncharitable we are becoming!" said Mavis, seating herself at the piano. "After all, he is not more vacuous or hard up for suitable words than the majority of men about town. Have you decided yet what I am to sing?"

He placed before her the words and music of the sweet old song, "Drink to me only with thine eyes," and she sang it at his request—her fresh, sweet, thrilling young voice and silvery notes deepening the spell already created by her gentle beauty.

Will Meredith, hopelessly in love, encouraged anew by the absence of his rival, bent over her, coldness and jealous doubts forgotten, pleading for song after song, drinking in the melody with rapt passionate delight, until Mam'selle waking up suddenly from her after-dinner nap brought the blissful period to an end.

Will Meredith was about to enter the drawing-room on the next morning in search of Mavis, who had promised him a two-hours' sitting for the picture he was engaged upon. Opening the

door gently, his heart well-nigh stood still at the scene he beheld.

In a chair by the lace-curtained window sat Luke Tressider. Bending over him, one little hand resting lightly upon his broad shoulder, was Mavis Neville. The Cornishman's face was averted, so that Will Meredith could not read its expression, but the girl's attitude was evidently one of timid entreaty.

Eric she could look round at the sound of the opening door, the intruder had disappeared, his mind in a state of chaos.

"Great Heaven, how I have been deceived in that girl!" was the first coherent thought that darted through the young man's brain. "I deemed her pure, unworlly, incapable of accepting that fellow for his wealth. Poor, credulous fool, not to know that every woman has her price! How amused she must have felt that day when we were talking of love as all-sufficient in itself and I failed to detect the lie, the deceit, in those beautiful eyes. She is aware of my love for her—she must be, although I have never avowed it. My poverty held me back. Luke Tressider, with his money-bags, will have an easy walk over. No need for him to be diffident in his wooing."

Standing alone in the deserted dining-room, with his hard, merciless thoughts of the girl he both loved and hated, Meredith heard Luke Tressider's heavy footstep descend the stairs, heard the front door close behind him, then followed him in fancy as he went on his way, a glad, exultant worder.

"Oh, Mr. Meredith, I am so sorry. I quite forgot my promise to sit for you this morning. Is it too late?"

Mavis stood before him, a certain dewy tenderness in her dark blue eyes, a little smile curving her lips. She had not expected to find him in the dining-room. His presence there had recalled to mind her broken engagement.

"Yes, it is too late," he replied, abruptly. "I came to remind you of your promise, Miss Neville, a little while ago, but you were entertaining Mr. Tressider at the time, and I should have been *de trop*, so I came away again!"

The crimson colour flooded her small face; the angry contempt, the reproach in his tone, were so evident.

"I—I thought I heard some one open the door," she faltered.

"I was the untimely intruder!" he went on, bitterly. "Being a firm believer in the grammatical old proverb 'Two's company, three's none,' I soon relieved you of my presence, however!"

Most men who are worth anything possess a temper. Will Meredith was no exception to this rule, and his temper was at white heat as he stood there with compressed lips and knitted brow, towering in his superior height over the cause of so much disquietude, who regarded him intently.

"I think you are very ungenerous when Mr. Tressider is in question!" said Mavis, warmly.

"Indeed! A similar charge cannot be lodged against you!" he retorted, a spasm of pain crossing his face. "I had ventured to hope—but it is folly to allude to that now. I should only distress you needlessly, since I presume that you are engaged, or about to become so, to Mr. Tressider. I inferred as much from your attitude just now!"

"Then you arrived at a premature conclusion!" said Mavis, blushing furiously as she spoke. "Mr. Tressider asked me to become his wife, it is true, and I refused. At the same time I am very sorry to have given him pain. He is not full of envy, hatred, and malice like—some other people I know!"

The revulsion of feeling, the sudden inrush of joy and renewed hope, the result of her words, carried Will Meredith out of himself on a tidal wave of passionate relief and thankfulness. Clasping Mavis to his heart, he rained kisses upon her sweet sensitive face.

"Will—Mr. Meredith—how dare you?" she gasped, tearing herself away from him half-frightened, half-indignant at his vehemence.

"Mavis, darling!" he exclaimed, imploringly, imprisoning her hands in his strong ones, "you must know how dear you are to me—how essential; and the relief your words have brought with them. My poverty and not my will has kept me silent until now. A little while ago, when I thought you had accepted Mr. Tressider, the misconception well-nigh maddened me. Thank Heaven, you are still free! Mavis, must my want of fortune for ever stand between us? Dare I hope that you care even a little for me in return? Give me some encouragement, and I will work harder than ever to prove myself deserving of you! Was it for my sake you refused Mr. Tressider?"

"Yes," murmured the girl, hiding her face upon his shoulder, as he drew her towards him. "I have never loved anyone but you, Will. How could you deem me capable of accepting Mr. Tressider?"

"Darling, forgive me. I will never doubt or misjudge you again!" he said fervently, straining her to his heart in passionate gladness. "It was my love that rendered me so madly jealous. And you will become my wife, Mavis, as soon as I am in a position to claim you!"

"Yes, providing Papa's consent can be obtained, and I do not think he will withhold it."

"And my poverty!"

"Will never lessen my love for you. Riches are not everything, dear, and since I have never been accustomed to them, I am the less likely to crave for them."

"Half-an-hour ago I deemed you false, mercenary, calculating!" he said, remorsefully. "Mavis, my little queen, can you ever forgive me?"

"Yes, if the offence is not repeated," she whispered, with a smile. "Will, I am afraid we are selfishly happy. That poor Mr. Tressider—!"

"What of him?"

"Would you believe it?"—she went on—"when I told him, as kindly as possible, that we could never be anything but friends, he actually broke down and cried! It was dreadful to see such a big fellow give way like that, and to regard myself as the cause."

"For real softness and vulnerability you must go to a big fellow," said Will, laughingly. "Little men think most of their own dignity. It is your giant who gets the hardest hit, who goes to the wall in affairs of this kind. Cheer up, darling; Tressider has not received a death-blow at your hands. He'll recover yet, and we shall reckon him among our friends."

Sydney Neville failed to display much gratification upon being requested to sanction the engagement entered into between Mavis and Will Meredith.

"Frankly speaking, Meredith," said the artist, "I should have preferred Luke Tressider as my prospective son-in-law, much as I like and esteem you individually. Like myself, unfortunately, you are poor; your prospects are uncertain, whereas Tressider could have provided handsomely for my little girl, and relieved me of much anxiety with regard to her future. Since she cares for you, however, I am not sufficiently Spartan to stand between you and forbid the banns. One condition I must insist on, though. You must be in receipt of at least three hundred a year before you marry Mavis. On no other terms will I consent to your being engaged."

"I am quite willing to agree to the condition," was the reply. "Indeed, I am grateful to you, sir, for not rejecting my proposal altogether. I am well aware of my insignificance as a suitor. Mavis has promised to wait until I can claim her, and with such an incentive to spur me on I cannot fail to command the desired success."

Luke Tressider came no more to the West Kensington villa. He had, for a man of his type, taken his rejection very keenly to heart. Dogs and horses, pugilists and poker, alike failed to console the disconsolate lover. He went abroad, and Mavis breathed more freely in consequence.

Gretchen, having scented out their engagement by some occult process, was for ever regarding Will and Mavis with big, curious blue eyes, as if the new relation in which they stood

to each other had rendered them objects of keen interest to her.

The baby face beneath the mob cap was constantly wreathed in smiles, for Gretchen had recently obtained a lover herself, a big Guardsman, and she seemed to think this fact established a kind of freemasonry between her and the upstairs lovers.

"I think Gretchen must be going off her head," said Mavis, laughingly, one morning. "She forgot to make any toast for breakfast, and she sent the eggs up unboiled yesterday."

A terrific crash in the lower regions, and the sound of Mam'selle's voice approaching *crescendo*, sent Mavis off to ascertain what damage had been done.

"Another little row between France and Germany again!" asked Will Meredith, lazily, upon her return. "Are the two countries engaged in deadly warfare?"

CHAPTER III.

"GERMANY, otherwise Gretchen, has got a lover, you know," explained Mavis, with a conscious blush, "a big Guardsman, and the conquest seems to have turned her brain. She wants two evenings out instead of one. Auntie refuses to make this concession; and Germany, in revenge, contrives to let our best soup-tureen slip through her fingers, and come to grief on the stone floor. It is dreadfully tiresome."

"And the state of affairs at the present moment between the belligerents?" inquired Will Meredith.

"Oh! Germany has retired to the kitchen to sink, while France has gone to her bedroom to shed tears over the broken soup-tureen. Poor Auntie, she is so cross with that 'small little girl,' as she calls Gretchen, yet, with all her faults, we should be sorry to lose Germany. What have you got there, Will—a ring?"

"Yes," he replied, drawing her closer to him, and placing the ring in her hand for inspection. "It is about the only article of value that I possess, always excepting yourself. It belonged to my father originally. Indeed, it has been in our family for many generations. It is a family heirloom."

"It is lovely!" exclaimed Mavis, slipping it on her slim white finger, for which it was much too large.

The ring consisted of a magnificent sapphire, engraved with the Merediths' crest, and surrounded with diamonds of the first water, that flashed and scintillated in the sunlight.

"It must be worth a great deal of money, Will?"

"Some one offered me a hundred guineas for it not long ago," he rejoined; "but I refused to sell my heirloom. We Merediths were once people of some importance in our own county, and only the pinch of extreme poverty would induce me to part with this, the one remaining relic of more prosperous times!"

"What are you young people examining, pray—a ring?" asked Sydney Neville, entering the room, his large, genial individuality seeming to fit it with sudden life and action. "That looks suspicious. It is only an engagement ring, I presume? Otherwise, you will have the indignant parent, myself, swooping down upon you both for perjury!"

"It is not even that, sir!" said Will Meredith, passing the ring to him with a smile. "Mavis would be puzzled to keep it on her finger. This is an heirloom!"

"And a very valuable one!" rejoined Sydney Neville, holding the ring up, and examining it with the eye of a connoisseur. "That sapphire is absolutely flawless, and the setting is superb. Do you wear this ring as a rule? I have never observed it upon your finger."

"No; I keep it locked up in my dressing-case," said the young man. "Such a ring would hardly match with my present fortunes; and then there would be the danger of losing it, since I am naturally careless and somewhat absent-minded as well."

"A wise precaution," remarked the artist, returning the jewel to its owner. "So long as you

retain that ring, you will always have realisable property in case of need. Are you coming to the club with me for an hour to give me my revenge at billiards? He beat me hollow yesterday, Mavis. Nice conduct that on the part of my prospective son-in-law!"

Towards the end of July, when London became unbearably hot and oppressive, Sydney Neville proposed a trip to the seaside, since their means that year would not admit of their going farther afield.

His pictures had sold badly, and at reduced prices, much to his disappointment and annoyance.

Will Meredith gladly seconded the motion. To wander with Mavis by the seashore late and early, to lie recumbent upon the warm sand while she read Tennyson to him in her soft, musical voice; to row her over the smooth, blue waters of a summer sea, would be delightful, indeed, coming after a spell of hard work.

St. Leonard's was decided upon in family concourse, and Mam'selle began to pack ready for departure, or, rather, to turn everything topsy-turvy, for Mavis did the actual packing.

"We must have some fresh toilettes for the promenade and for church on Sunday," she declared, extracting a cheque from Sydney Neville for the purpose.

The artist grumbled audibly as he filled it in.

"I believe a Frenchwoman's first thought upon entering Paradise would be to ascertain what the angels had got on!" he remarked, sarcastically, to Will Meredith; "and whether they were *en grande toilette* or not! Dress, with her, is the primary consideration!"

Yet he, too, shared in the pleasant stir of approaching departure, or appeared to do so. And when they assembled at luncheon on the day previous to that appointed for their journey, the artist had never seemed in more genial mood.

"What has become of Mr. Neville?" asked Will Meredith, a few hours later, when Mam'selle entered the studio with two cups of tea. "I have seen nothing of him since luncheon. He is playing the truant."

The Frenchwoman nearly dropped the little tray she was holding as he spoke. Then, setting it down, she made some incoherent reply, glanced round the studio and hurried away, evidently in quest of her brother-in-law.

Having packed what sketching materials he required to take with him, Will Meredith went to the drawing-room to ascertain if Sydney Neville was there.

He found it empty. As he turned to quit it Mavis entered and came up to him.

Her face was deathly pale; the look of vague terror and disquietude he had seen once before in her eyes had returned to them. The little hands he clasped in his were cold and trembling.

"I am so sorry," she began, with a spasmodic smile; "but we cannot start to-morrow as arranged. Papa has—has been obliged to go away again suddenly, and I should not like to leave home until he returns. You won't be angry, Will!"

"Angry!" he repeated. "Certainly not; least of all with you, Mavis. At the same time, it is odd that your father made no allusion to his intended journey at luncheon. Surely he must have been aware of it then!"

"Perhaps, I cannot say," she replied. "He would not be guilty of any intentional discourtesy towards you. I am certain of that."

"How long will he be absent?"

"In all probability three days—or even longer. If you would like to start without us—"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," he interposed, promptly. "Without you, Mavis, the projected holiday would lose all its charm for me. Are you at liberty to disclose the purport of these mysterious journeys undertaken by your father at such short notice from time to time? As your affianced husband, some confidence might be reposed in me."

"Papa has requested me not to divulge their nature at present to anyone," she replied, with quivering lips. "Perhaps some day they will cease—or he will explain them himself."

"Very well, I can wait," said Will Meredith, tenderly, passing his arm around her waist with a protecting air. "Only I regret these journeys on your account, Mavis, since the anxiety they cause you is so obvious."

The remainder of the day that had dawned so brightly passed slowly and heavily away. An atmosphere of gloom and depression, of strained, anxious waiting had settled down once more upon the household.

Mam'selle's eyes looked as if she had been crying bitterly. Will Meredith, surrounded on all sides by mystery, began to feel impatient. All sorts of speculations and surmises bearing upon the artist's strange conduct flitted through his brain.

"Where is Mavis?" he asked, entering the drawing-room just as it was growing dusk the next day.

"Gone to bed with a bad headache," said Mam'selle, who sat there alone. "I was to bid you 'good-night' for her."

He noticed the tremor in her voice, and wondered at it. Feeling restless and uneasy he strolled out presently to purchase some cigars. He had nearly reached the house on his way back when a sudden commotion, men shouting and swearing, women screaming, arose.

Another second, and a hansom dashed wildly round the corner of the suburban street, the horse going at a mad gallop. The driver—who still clung to his perch, had lost all control over the affrighted animal, the rotten reins breaking as he tugged at them.

Passers-by scattered right and left to avoid the erratic career of the hansom. A policeman made a futile grab at the horse's head as it swept past him, and narrowly escaped being knocked down. The shouts of the pursuers only added to the creature's panic.

There were two persons, a man and a girl, in the hansom. The girl's shrill scream of affright reached Will Meredith's ears as, darting into the centre of the road, he awaited the horse's approach and seized it by the bridle, his iron grip arresting its career, and caused it to recoil upon its haunches.

A crowd quickly collected. The driver of the hansom jumped down, and the fares also alighted frightened, but unharmed.

As he glanced at them, Will Meredith recoiled in horrified astonishment.

The man was Luke Tressider! the girl clinging convulsively to his arm none other than Mavis Neville, his fiancée!

As they recognised each other, Will Meredith regarded her incredulously, reluctant to accept the evidence of his own senses, since it must needs tell so terribly against her, while ruining his happiness.

"Mavis!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, "you here and with Tressider!"

"Take me home," she murmured, an agony of appeal in her dark blue eyes. "I—I am ill. I have had such a terrible fright. Was it you who stopped the horse just now?"

"Yes," he replied, briefly, and sternly, turning away from her towards Tressider, who was settling matters with the driver of the hansom.

Mavis, his little love, upon whose fidelity and unerring sense of womanly honour he would have staked his life half-an-hour ago! Mavis, supposed to have retired early to her room with a bad headache, driving about town in a hansom with Luke Tressider as her companion? What shameful deceit had been practised upon him!

Will Meredith's head swam as he stood there confronting them both in grim silence.

"You nearly broke our necks!" said the Cornishman, irascibly, to Maby. "And then you expect me to pay for the damage done, confound you!"

"It wasn't my fault, sir, that the 'orse bolted," rejoined the man, deprecatingly. "That blooming tricycle with the coloured lamps started him off. I'd like to see them all smashed, I would! It's hard on a cove to have his reins broke, and his cab strained all to pieces, while—"

"There's a sovereign for you," interposed Tressider. "The lady and I will walk the rest of

the way. We have had enough of your cab for one night."

Pushing his way through the crowd that had collected round the hansom Luke Tressider nodded awkwardly in recognition of Will Meredith and offered his arm to Mavis.

She glanced imploringly at her lover, but he refused to meet her eyes or to constitute himself her escort, and the trio started for home in a most embarrassing silence—the silence that comes before a storm.

Both Luke Tressider and Mavis Neville were obviously disconcerted by Will Meredith's impudent appearance.

The big, fair, ruddy Cornishman seemed utterly at a loss for words as they went along.

He was in faultless evening attire, a diamond solitaire gleaming in his snowy shirt-front, un concealed by the light unbuckled overcoat he wore.

"It's just the very deuce!" he muttered to his companion. "I wouldn't have had it occur for fifty pounds!"

Mavis made no rejoinder. Her face, white and rigid in its tearless misery, looked straight ahead.

She had on a light summer dust-cloak, and her gossamer veil was raised. She felt as if she were on the verge of a fainting fit.

"By Jove! that was a plucky thing you did just now, Meredith, in stopping that brute of a horse!" said Tressider, assuming an ease of manner that he was far from feeling.

"You think so?" was the terse reply.

"Undoubtedly I do. Miss Neville and I have cause to feel extremely grateful to you for coming to our rescue."

This was a crum. The pair would far sooner have taken their chance of being shot out, or introduced to a lamp-post, than have owed their rescue to the very man of all others they most wished to avoid meeting.

"I—or—happened to come across Miss Neville on her return from visiting some friends at Baywater. She had lost her way, and I was conveying her home when that in—furlated animal bolted with us. I daresay, now, you thought it funny?"

His tone, at once conciliatory and savage, would, at any other time, have been ludicrous. That he detested Will Meredith was palpable, yet, for some reason, he sought to explain away any ill impression, the result of the *contretemps*.

Will Meredith's lip curled scornfully as he listened to this feeble explanation evolved from a not too fertile brain on the spur of the moment.

"Yes, I did think it funny," he replied, in a choked kind of voice, as they reached the Queen Anne villa, to be admitted by Gretchen, whose blue eyes opened to their widest extent at beholding them.

"Ah, Otel, but what is this!" exclaimed Mam'selle, wildly starting to her feet as the two men, accompanied by Mavis, entered the drawing-room. "What has happened?"

"Mr. Tressider was escorting me home in a hansom when the horse bolted, and Will, who happened to be passing, stopped it," said Mavis, speaking swiftly, as if to prevent Mam'selle, in her alarm, from making any disclosures.

"My poor child! Are you hurt?"

"No," with a faint smile, "only frightened. I am going upstairs to take off my things."

"Stop!" cried Will Meredith, placing a firm, restraining hand upon her arm. "Before you go, Mavis, you owe me an explanation. The one vouchsafed by Mr. Tressider I regard as an amiable fiction. An hour ago I was informed by your aunt that you had gone to your room for the night. I went out, to discover you riding in a hansom, accompanied by Mr. Tressider. As your affianced husband, I demand an explanation of such conduct on your part!"

"I cannot say more than you have already heard," she replied, nervously. "I was really in doubt as to which way I had better take, and Mr. Tressider kindly volunteered to see me safe home."

Will Meredith's brown eyes flashed sudden fire.

"Are you all in league to deceive me?" he

cried, fiercely. "If you will not admit the truth, Tressider shall!"

"I am willing to admit just as much as Miss Neville desires, and no more!" retorted Tressider, with equal heat. "She is in no wise compromised by what has occurred. If you can doubt her, and harbour suspicions unworthy of a gentleman, you don't deserve to stand to her in your present relation!"

The two men faced each other defiantly, their passions thoroughly aroused.

"You are a cad, sir, to shelter yourself behind a promise given to a lady, to make it your excuse for remaining silent, and by so doing imperilling her reputation," cried Will Meredith, "a miserable cad!"

Ere the Cornishman could reply, Mavis had stepped between them.

"Don't, pray I don't resent what has not been said," she murmured, in tones of passionate entreaty. "If you have any consideration for me, go—go at once. I implore you to do so, without attempting to justify yourself or me. Your presence here, after what has occurred, can only be productive of harm."

"Since you request me to do so I will go," replied Luke Tressider, "leaving you to the tender mercies of this gentleman, in whose person all good breeding and many qualities would appear to be centred. I can only say that he is a bigger fool than I took him to be if he fancied his threats could induce me to act in defiance of your expressed wishes. Consideration for you, Miss Neville, alone causes me to refrain from any immediate reprisal with regard to the insult I have received."

He went, leaving Mam'selle sobbing bitterly in the depths of an easy chair. Ere Will Meredith could detain her Mavis had flown upstairs, to return, in a few moments, weary, white-faced, the look of some hunted creature in her great dark blue eyes, yet, within, firm and self-collected.

"Mavis," cried the young artist, imploringly, "would you drive me mad? Would you have me deem you capable of conduct unworthy of my affianced wife—of falsehood and deceit? If not, you will at once remove the jealous doubts to which you have given rise, and explain your conduct of to-night!"

He beat over her impishly as he spoke, his eyes reading her drooping face with pitiless scrutiny.

"Will!" the faint, sweet, beseeching voice rose in a wail of pain and entreaty, "can you not trust me blindly for once? Indeed, I have not swerved in my allegiance to you. I am not, as you say, false."

"Then prove it!" he said, sternly, his voice choked with passion. "What have you in common with Tressider, you, my fiancee, that should justify you in going out to meet him by stealth? Your silence establishes your guilt. You have come to regard the dismissal of your wealthy lover as a foolish act, I suppose. It is the old story. With gold in one scale, love in the other, love may be expected to kick the beam."

Lower and lower drooped the pretty dark head beneath the weight of his bitter words till it rested upon the little trembling hands.

Her silence, instead of arousing his pity, only added fuel to the fire of his wrath. Had she been able to refute his accusations would she not at once have done so? She had played him false, and he, poor fool, had deemed her incapable of deceit.

CHAPTER IV.

"I HAVE done no wrong!" Mavis repeated, with quivering lips and tear-filled eyes, "yet I am not at liberty to reveal the exact nature of the urgent business that necessitated a meeting with Luke Tressider, my old lover. Is it my fault that he once asked me to be his wife? His love reflects no discredit upon me, and it had nothing whatever to do with our assignation to-night!"

"And you expect me to believe this?" cried Will Meredith, sternly, "to rest content with such a vague explanation. Take your choice,

Mavis. Either tell me all, and leave me to judge whether you have acted imprudently, or renounce the idea of becoming my wife. The latter alternative is, perhaps, what you most desire. In that case you should have asked me openly to restore your freedom, and I would not have refused."

"Oh, Will!" she moaned, falling on her knees at his feet, "be merciful! I have suffered so much to-day. I can bear no more!"

He raised her gently, a cruel pain at his heart the while.

"Mavis, Mavis! only comply with my request!" he said, a sob of agony in his voice that revealed to her the depth of his suffering. "You shall not find me harsh or unforgiving if you will but confide in me, and thus prove that your love is still in my keeping."

"We must part, then," she replied, slowly; "I cannot fulfil the condition upon which you insist."

"If we part," he reminded her, bitterly, "it will be for ever! I shall leave this house at once, Mavis, will nothing move you to speak?"

"I cannot," she said, the words coming brokenly from between her dry lips. "Do not press me any further. It is worse than useless."

"Then you have ceased to love me?"

His handsome, haggard young face was close to hers, the dark eyes beneath the level brows sought hers, as if striving to read there the secret she would not reveal.

"You must be content to trust me blindly," she said, weakly, "or let me go, as you say, for ever. My lips are sealed with regard to the transaction that took me from home to-night."

"Then our engagement is at an end," rejoined Will Meredith, coldly. "Should Mr. Neville, when he returns, desire to know my reasons for thus abruptly terminating it, I shall be quite willing to state them, unless, in deference to your wishes, I remain silent upon the subject."

A smile, the saddest he had ever seen, wreathed her lips as she spoke.

"You may leave me to explain matters to my father," she said, quietly. "No blame shall be ascribed to you—and now good-bye."

"Good-bye. May Heaven forgive you the misery you have caused me to suffer!" he said, briefly and sternly, as he turned to go.

"Mavis, my child, it must not, it shall not be! I cannot permit you to sacrifice yourself to such an extent. Mr. Meredith, I command you to stop!"

The protest came from Mam'selle, overlooked, forgotten, by Will and Mavis in their excited discussion. As the Frenchwoman came forward, her brown eyes full of unshed tears, fatal words trembling upon her lips, Mavis interposed to check the threatened disclosure.

"Hush, auntie!" she said, throwing her arms around Mam'selle's plump little waist, a certain proud, serene, girlish dignity replacing her previous humble, entreating attitude. "You forget yourself, dear. Anything you said now could only alter matters for the worse—not for the better—and I should never forgive you for interfering, for trying to reconcile Mr. Meredith to me. He has arrived at his decision and I have no wish to alter it. Nothing less than a perfect faith could satisfy him—or me."

Overpowered by the superior force of her niece's will Mam'selle remained silent; and in silence Will Meredith bowed to the two ladies, and quitted the room where he had spent so many happy hours, his faith in the girl he still loved so well blown to the winds, his happiness hopelessly wrecked!

Going upstairs to his own rooms, he commenced packing in readiness for departure. The sooner he quitted that now hateful house the better for all concerned.

Crossing the room with a handful of things to be stowed anyhow into his portmanteau, he espied some small articles lying upon the carpet.

He picked it up and carried it to the light.

It was only a woman's mauve silk glove, to

which a faint delicate odour of perfume still clung.

He recognised it instantly as one of the gloves Mavis had worn that very night when he came across her in the hansom with Luke Tressider.

By what agency had the glove been transferred to his room since then? Who had dropped it there? It was most improbable that Mavis had herself entered his room for any purpose since her return; yet how else could the presence of the glove be accounted for?

The very atmosphere of the house seemed full of mystery.

Will Meredith locked this unexpected find in his desk after pressing the glove to his lips.

The next day he quitted Belmont Villa without encountering Mavis again. As the front door closed behind him it seemed to shut him out not merely from the house, but from hope and love, and all that rendered life pleasant and desirable as well.

The Royal Academy on the day after the private view.

A well-dressed, fashionable throng was streaming up the wide, shallow staircase of Burlington House after a general rendering up of sticks and umbrellas below, to enter the magnificent rooms hung from floor to ceiling with the productions of modern painters.

A year had elapsed since Will Meredith quitted Belmont Villa in such fierce anger against the girl he loved—the girl he had not once come in contact with since that bitter parting.

The artist looked full three years older as he instigated his way through the fashionable throng, still in suspense with regard to the fate of his own work.

Since he had failed to receive a "varnishing" ticket he feared the worst.

His heart beat rapidly as he went from room to room, scanning the walls in search of the picture upon which so many ambitious hopes had been centred.

He was not alone. Leaning upon his arm was a superbly-dressed woman of three-and-thirty, a woman with large, brilliant dark eyes, aquiline features, and glossy, dark hair wound in thick coils round her finely-moulded head.

Her figure, perfect in its full-flowing curves, was displayed to advantage by the rich dress of olive-green and shrimp-pink that she wore, with a ravishing little bonnet to match.

Her ripe, queenly beauty of form and feature caused many glances—some admiring, some envious—to be directed towards her.

"Don't despair," she said, encouragingly to her companion in low, firm, musical tones. "There are yet two rooms unvisited. Your work may be in one of them."

"I fear not," he rejoined, bitterly. "I am fated to be unsuccessful, it seems, and Jupiter himself had to submit to fate. He could not struggle against it, neither can I."

"Nonsense!" retorted Beatrice Millward, as her dark eyes alternately scanned the walls and the handsome, gloomy face of the young artist. "To a certain extent a man controls his own fortune, or what would become of free will!"

"At least fate has been kind in granting me your friendship and sympathy, Mrs. Millward," he replied, with an empressment that brought a faint tinge of colour to the clear olive of her cheek.

As they entered the last room a group collected in front of a large picture hung on the line attracted their attention. Beatrice Millward went towards it.

"Look!" she exclaimed, her beautiful eyes shining with excitement, her wonted stately calm dispelled.

Will Meredith did look, his breath coming thick and fast, a whole chime of bells—joy-bells—ringing in his ears, to see his canvas well hung upon the line, creating an evident sensation.

The large, elaborately framed picture represented May-day in the olden time.

A group of graceful village maidens and stalwart, handsome youths were dancing around the flower-wreathed Maypole. The central figure,

the May-queen, a slender girl with dewy violet eyes, fresh, pure, flower-like in her girlish loveliness, gowned in spotless white, bore a striking resemblance to Mavis Neville.

His success, so unlooked for, treading upon the heels of repeated failures, well-nigh unmanned Will Meredith.

Owing to some mistake or neglect he had failed to receive a varnishing ticket. Otherwise his good-fortune would have been revealed to him earlier in the day. He had worked hard, and his reward had come at last.

"No need to rail at fate now," remarked Beatrice Millward, with a radiant smile, "when she has treated you so kindly. The picture will create a perfect *furor*. And I am the first to congratulate you on the success achieved."

He remained silent, gazing intently at his own work, around which new arrivals were constantly flocking, while words of favourable criticism and praise reached his ear where he stood. A great wave of bitterness, of hopeless sorrow and regret, had risen to drown the sudden gladness and elation.

"Oh, Mavis, my love! my darling! had you but remained faithful in your allegiance to me, what a triumph this would have been to-day!" was the reflection surging through his mind. "As it is, while conducting towards it, you have robbed my success of the joy that should have attended it. Without you life can never be the same to me again."

"Has the May-queen suddenly descended from her frame like the ancestors in *Ruddigore*?" whispered Beatrice Millward. "That girl to the left, dressed in white, is her very counterpart!"

"Mavis!"

He uttered her name involuntarily. She was standing not a yard from him—his lost love—her eyes fastened upon the picture. The sweet, mobile face, the deep, haunting eyes had lost none of their old fascination for him.

At that moment she turned, to behold him and his companion watching her.

With a glance of pained reproach that he never forgot, she disappeared in the crowd ere Will Meredith could acknowledge her presence.

"Who is that young lady?" asked Beatrice Millward.

"A Miss Neville. She sat to me for the May-queen," was the abrupt response. "But we have seen little of each other since."

Beatrice Millward had plenty of tact. She felt certain that the girl with the lovely face had in some way played Will Meredith false, after winning his heart; and a jealous pang, a sense of anger against this rival, was the consequence.

Yet outwardly she remained placid, gracious, unaware of anything amiss calculated to mar his well-earned success, while making no farther allusion to Mavis Neville.

When they quitted the Academy she carried the artist off to her pretty little house in Park-lane to luncheon.

He was a frequent visitor there, to the envy of men his superiors in wealth and rank, who had yet failed to find their way into the charming widow's esteem and favour.

Will Meredith had been introduced to Mrs. Millward while his wounded love and pride, his sense of irreparable loss, were still unabated.

The society of the beautiful widow, the sympathy and congenial friendship she accorded him, were very soothing to the young man.

He could never love again; yet his heart craved for affection, interest, friendship—something to fill the void created in it by Mavis Neville, and Beatrice Millward gave him precisely what he most wanted in this respect.

Only once had Meredith encountered Sydney Neville since leaving Belmont Villa. On that occasion the artist had positively declined to enter into conversation respecting the event that had led to the breaking off of the engagement. He seemed ill at ease, and anxious to shun the subject.

"You were not to be censured for acting as you did, Meredith," he said, hurriedly, "since an explanation was withheld. At the same time, Mavis, poor child, had done nothing amiss. It was an unfortunate affair. Since she and you

are hopelessly parted, we need not allude to it again!"

"But if she has satisfied you—"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, let us drop the subject!" exclaimed Neville, irritably. "She has extracted a promise from me never to reveal to you the circumstances of that night, and I cannot break it. My child is innocent of wrong in thought, word, or deed, and that is all I can say!"

Three weeks later Meredith was at work in his studio when a brother artist sauntered in.

"Heard the news?" he inquired, languidly, as he lighted one of Will's cigars, and threw himself into an easy-chair.

"What news?"

"That little girl of Neville's is going to marry a howling swell. The luck some people get is disgusting. That lazy beggar Neville will be able to take it easier than ever, since he will have a rich son-in-law to draw upon. Drawing of that kind pays a sight better than painting!"

The brush dropped from Will Meredith's hand. It took him some time to find it.

"Did you hear the name of the man Miss Neville is about to marry?" he inquired.

"Yes; Tressider. He's a Cornishman, with a fine old place in Cornwall, and a pot of money," was the reply. "Can't imagine what induced him to propose to a shy little thing like Mavis Neville, a girl without any 'go' in her. Every man to his taste, but she wouldn't be mine!"

Will Meredith repressed a desire to kick the free-spoken young gentleman, and bore with him until he quitted the studio, leaving Meredith to the full bitterness of his own reflections.

Mavis about to marry Tressider after all, to sell herself for gold. This news tended to confirm all his previous suspicions, to sweep away even the faint doubt in her favour until then lingering in his mind.

"False, doubly false, mercenary, heartless!" he exclaimed, fiercely, as he threw aside his brush. "Why should I regret her? Why allow the fact of her approaching marriage to affect me so keenly? I am well rid of such a woman. And yet, not even the knowledge of her worthlessness can kill my love for her!"

It seemed so difficult to reconcile such calculating worldliness and deceit with the frank sincerity, the tender trustfulness of old, and the passionate distress she had evinced at their parting.

She would have made a clever actress, he told himself, grimly. He painted no more that day. Dressing himself, he went out later on to visit Beatrice Millward.

He was always certain of a welcome there. The beautiful widow chanced to be alone in the drawing-room when he was announced. Artistic and harmonious as all her surroundings were, they served to enhance the dark rich-tinted mature loveliness of the woman whom society acknowledged as one of its queens.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked presently, glancing at his troubled face. "You look ill, haggard. You are working too hard. You need rest."

By degrees her interest in Will Meredith had deepened. If he cared for her sufficiently why should they not come together, and let the world talk and wonder till it was tired? Her woman's heart yearned for the sympathy, the close, congenial companionship hitherto denied it.

Married at seventeen to an old man by her family, for the sake of his wealth, Beatrice Millward had known much of love's bitterness, little of its joy. The young officer who had won her heart had been ordered abroad with his regiment, after treachery and deceit had been restored to it in order to estrange the lover. Tidings of his death from yellow fever had reached her soon after her marriage, and rendered her life yet more desolate. Now a kind of Indian summer seemed about to dawn for her with the advent of Will Meredith.

"I am not ill," he replied, in answer to her question, "only restless, unsettled. I think I shall go to Africa for a while and hunt big game. When I return—"

Something in her face induced him to pause.

Hearts are caught in the rebound, and he was fiercely, recklessly miserable just then, in a mood to say or do anything calculated to afford him immediate relief.

"Would you regret my absence, Beatrice?" he asked abruptly, bending over her.

She raised her dark, liquid eyes to his, and he read his answer there.

"You have only to bid me remain, and I will do so," he went on, kneeling beside her.

"Do you know all that such a command would involve?" she asked, playfully, yet tenderly. "If you seek to make me your wife—and I am willing to submit that you are the only man I would consent to marry—you must remember that I am several years older than you, while—"

"Beatrice, if you will accept me as your husband," he interposed, "I will endeavour to make you forget the greatness of the condescension on your part. It is as if a queen had stepped down from her throne to wed a subject! I will strive to make you happy in return!"

"Only be good to me, Will," she murmured. "Only open your heart to receive me, and I shall be content!"

"There is one thing you ought to know," he went on. "It is all over now, but—"

"You cared a great deal for a girl—the girl who sat for the May-queen," she replied, tearfully. "I read it in your face at the time! I am glad you have been so candid with me!"

"She jilted me," he resumed, "for a rich fellow. But for you I should have lost faith in women entirely. Beatrice, your love will you prove my earthly salvation!"

"Let us agree to make the best of our lives together," she said, gently, as their lips met, and thus the compact was sealed.

CHAPTER V.

"WHO THE deuce can that be stumbling upstairs at this time of night?" muttered Will Meredith going to the door of his sitting-room, candle in hand, to inspect the late visitor.

His new lodger were in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly. They consisted of a sitting-room, with a bedroom leading out of it, his studio being on another floor.

It was long past midnight, and he was about to undress, when the sound of heavy, uncertain footfalls brought him out on to the landing to reconnoitre.

There were no other lodgers on that floor, so the untimely visitor must needs be for him.

As the latter reached the landing with some difficulty, Will Meredith regarded him in all astonishment.

"Neville!" he exclaimed, upon recognising the artist.

"Yes, dear boy! I—I was passing, and I thought I would give you a call. Seen nothing of you lately, you know! You've eat us altogether!"

"I couldn't imagine who it was at this hour!" said Meredith, leading the way into the sitting-room.

Once within the radius of the lamp-light, he regarded Sydney Neville intently, at a loss to understand the subtle change that had taken place in his manner and appearance.

The big, handsome artist had thrown himself into an easy-chair. His eyes were dull and vacant, his speech thick, his dress slightly disordered.

These symptoms, taken in conjunction with the late visit to a man whom he had recently made a point of avoiding, and with whom he could have no topic of importance to discuss, seemed to indicate something very like temporary derangement.

"Can he have been drinking?" thought Will Meredith, yet the idea was improbable.

A more abstemious man than Sydney Neville, during the months Meredith had spent under his roof, could not apparently have existed.

"What will you take?" he inquired, producing sherry, cigars, brandy-and-eggs, and biscuits from the sideboard.

"A little brandy—neat," was the reply, as Sydney Neville rambled on from one subject to another, talking fitfully and incoherently to the young man, who sat opposite, regarding him with perplexed, questioning eyes.

"You haven't inquired after Mavis, or made any allusion to her!" he said at length, in an aggrieved tone.

"I hope Miss Neville is well!" replied Meredith, coldly.

"Yes, she's perfectly well. She's to be married you know, a month hence to Tressider's, Tressider's—"

His head drooped forward. He was falling asleep.

"Come I wake up, Neville," cried Will Meredith, shaking him gently. "It's time you went home."

"We won't go home till morning—too far off—sleep on sofa—shouldn't like to frighten Mavis," was the disconnected reply.

"He is drunk!" reflected Meredith, regretfully, as he assisted Sydney Neville to the sofa, and threw a travelling rug over him. "Can he have contracted intemperate habits of late? He was never like this before, to my knowledge."

He went to bed presently, leaving the door of communication between the two rooms open, should anything transpire. Yet he slept but little that night.

The unpleasant consciousness that Mavis Neville's father was slumbering in the next room in a state of profound intoxication tended to keep him awake.

How ashamed and degraded Sydney Neville would feel upon recovering his senses in the morning; and Mavis, what humiliation it would entail upon her to learn how and where her father had passed the night.

After all he was her father, and for her sake—little consideration as she deserved at his hands—Meredith had done the best he could for him under the circumstances.

His engagement to Beatrice Millward was only a few weeks old. He did not regret having entered into it. Her liking for him, her delicately-expressed sympathy, had first drawn him towards the beautiful widow.

Lonely, wretched, cynical, how could he fail to feel deeply grateful in return for such a favour and preference avinced for him by one who had so often been wooed in vain, who had turned away from wealthy and titled suitors to bestow herself upon a penniless artist?

Coming, as it did, after a cruel disillusion, her affection assumed a higher value in his sight.

If it failed to console him entirely for what he had suffered and lost it was still a rare gift, for which he must needs make some adequate return to the giver.

Yet the calm, passionless, tranquil affection he entertained for Beatrice Millward would not have borne comparison with the great, tumultuous love, the springtide of fervid devotion, that had moved his whole being towards Mavis Neville, thrilling it through and through with passionate, intense delight, and hopes yet to be realized in the rosy future.

He fell asleep towards morning. Waking with a start as the clock struck seven, he jumped out of bed, and throwing on his dressing-gown, entered the sitting-room, to ascertain if Sydney Neville still slept.

To his amazement he found it untenanted. The sofa was empty, the rug lay upon the floor; the bird had flown, possibly in search of the prurient worm.

"Gone home quietly rather than face me, I suppose," thought Will Meredith, with a sense of relief. "He was hardly conscious of what he was doing when he turned in here last night, and the morning brought reflection with it. So much the better. It would have been an awkward situation for us both, and, had he stayed, I must have asked him to breakfast with me."

Returning to his room, Will Meredith dressed rapidly. He had nearly completed his toilette when, searching the dressing-table for some article, he uttered an ejaculation.

"By Jove!"

Watch, chain, studs, card-case, purse, each

and all had vanished from their accustomed places.

In what direction was he to search for the thief?

A sudden horrible, overwhelming suspicion thrilled him from head to foot. He started nervously when his landlady knocked at the door.

"What is it, Mrs. Simpson?"

"Oh, if you please, sir, here's a policeman, who says he wants to see you at once," replied that lady in a state of trepidation, lest her lodger should have been abusing himself over-night by wrenching off knockers, extinguishing gas-lamps, or ringing bells, to account for his being thus wanted by the law.

"Tell him to come in!"

The policeman, a stalwart young fellow, with a square, intelligent face, entered accordingly. Having first ascertained that Mrs. Simpson was not listening at the keyhole outside on the landing, Will Meredith confronted his visitor.

"Have you lost anything quite recently, sir?" asked the latter.

"Have you found anything likely to belong to me, constable?" was the cautious rejoinder.

The man smiled.

"The Inspector would feel obliged, sir, if you would step round to the station at once," he said. "We've got a well-dressed individual there who was brought in early this morning. One of our men found him wandering about the streets in a muddled condition, unable to give an account of himself. On searching him several articles of jewellery were found upon him, likewise a card-case. The cards have your name and address on them, sir, the Inspector sent me round here to make inquiries."

"I'll come directly," said Will Meredith, and in less than ten minutes he was having an interview with the Inspector at the nearest police-station.

"This is the man," said the latter, as Sydney Neville, escorted by a policeman, was brought forward.

Will Meredith never forgot that dreadful moment, or the expression of agonized entreaty of speechless shame and despair on the artist's face as their eyes met. It would be hard to say which felt the keenest emotion.

Sydney Neville's faculties were perfectly clear now. He could realize his position and all that it involved. As he stood there, wiping the damp from his brow, he seemed to have aged ten years in a single night.

"These articles were found in the prisoner's possession," said the inspector, producing Will Meredith's watch, studs, rings, purse, and card-case. "They bear your initials, sir. Were they stolen from you last night?"

"No," replied Will Meredith, without a moment's hesitation. "They were mine, undoubtedly, but you are mistaken with regard to the manner in which this gentleman became possessed of them. They were not stolen. He won them from me last night at play."

The Inspector glanced keenly from one man to the other, and drew his own conclusions.

"In that case, sir," he said, "we need not detain him any longer, since the articles produced are, as you allege, his property, having changed hands. Of course, we were not to know that. The only charge against this gentleman now is of wandering in the streets without being able to give any account of himself."

"He is well known to me," replied Will Meredith, Sydney Neville still remaining silent, "and I will be responsible for his good behaviour, and undertake to see him safe home. He was drinking heavily last night, and lost his way, I suppose. He's all right now. Just ask one of your men to call a cab. Now, Neville, are you ready?"

A transfer of coin, an apology addressed to Sydney Neville by the officer, of which he took not the least notice, and then the two men were driven rapidly away in the direction of West Kensington.

"Dear start that!" observed the Inspector to one of his subordinates, "and Mr. Meredith has told a thundering lie. If that fellow had won

the watch and the other things at play wouldn't he have said so, instead of sitting there all in a heap, with guilt written plainly on his face, refusing to utter a word? It's a family affair, I expect, with more likely than not a woman at the bottom of it."

Once inside the cab, Sydney Neville leaned forward, shaking off the torpor that had held him spell-bound, and thrust the articles which had been restored to him into Will Meredith's hands.

"I was mad when I took them!" he exclaimed, hoarsely "quite mad! Do you credit my assertion?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Had you been in your senses you could not have done it. On that point I require no convincing."

Sydney Neville sank back in the cab, pale, panting for breath, the mere wreck of his former self.

"You are ill?" said Meredith, in alarm.

"I believe I am dying," he murmured. "Meredith, you have saved me from worse than death. Your generous falsehood has rescued me and mine from disgrace and dishonour. Was it for her sake that you displayed so much forbearance?"

"For her sake and yours also," was the reply. "The friendly feeling that once existed between us, Neville—the esteem in which I have held you—would have rendered me desirous under any circumstances of preserving your reputation intact."

Sydney Neville groaned.

"If you but knew all, you might even now regret the unprecedented generosity displayed towards one so unworthy of it," he said, slowly. "I have caused bitter suffering, and not to you alone through my besetting sin. And it is too late to remedy the wrong done now—too late!"

"To what do you allude?" asked Will Meredith, swiftly.

But Sydney Neville, rapidly sinking into a comatos condition, was unable to reply.

When the cab stopped in front of the pretty Queen Anne villa Gretchen opened the front-door ere the cabman could ring.

Just behind her were the pale, anxious faces of Mavis Neville and Mam'selle.

"Mr. Meredith!" cried the latter, scanning his face with frightened, brown eyes. "Have you come to tell us any bad news? My brother-in-law—"

"Is in the cab," interposed the young man. "Mr. Neville came to my rooms late last night, and, since he seems somewhat unwell, I have brought him home this morning."

"Oh, papa! papa!"

The words were uttered by Mavis, as, white and trembling, she flew down the garden-path towards the cab.

Will Meredith's unexpected appearance and the shameful fact of her father's weakness being revealed to him, seemed as if it would crush her with its weight.

She hardly glanced at her former lover as he assisted Sydney Neville into the house. An agony of sensitive shame prevented her eyes from meeting his.

"I think we had better get him upstairs to his room at once," said Meredith, addressing Mam'selle. "I am afraid he is even more ill than I imagined. I should advise you to send for a doctor."

While Gretchen flew off upon this errand, Will Meredith and the two ladies endeavoured to restore the artist to something like consciousness.

His heavy, stertorous breathing as he lay upon the bed alone broke the oppressive silence.

"Don't go," he murmured, faintly, as Meredith was about to quit the room when the doctor arrived. "There is something I must tell you ere I die, and the end is not far off. Stay with me until then."

Sydney Neville was correct in his presentiment. Excessive drinking, combined with some severe mental shock recently sustained, had, the doctor stated, accelerated a long-standing disease of the heart. In all probability the artist had but a few hours yet to live.

As the medicine administered imparted a little strength, his mental faculties rallied.

"Leave me for a little while alone with Meredith, my darling!" he said tenderly to the girl bending over him.

"Papa, have you forgotten your promise to remain silent respecting the past?" she cried imploringly; "to make no disclosure that will reflect upon yourself?"

Sydney Neville smiled sadly.

"Child, I cannot die without first removing the wrong impression that still exists in Meredith's mind with regard to your conduct," he said, earnestly. "Let me do you at least this tardy justice. Already he knows to what depths of degradation and infamy I can sink. But for his intervention I should have died in a prison cell, charged with stealing his property last night. Don't interrupt me, Meredith. She must learn the bitter truth, in order to realize how much we both owe you."

With bowed head Mavis crept from the room after listening to that pitiful story.

"I thank you," was all she said in passing Will Meredith, and the sorrow in her voice filled his heart with sudden pity.

"Come closer to me, dear boy," whispered the dying man. "You remember the night on which you came across Mavis and Luke Tressider in a hansom?"

"I am not likely to forget it," was the stern, brief reply.

"She was not false to you as you imagined," he went on. "It was my boasting sin that led up to the situation she refused to explain, since, had she done so, I should have been degraded for ever in your sight. For years past, from time to time, I have yielded to fits of intemperance, absenting myself from home for several days at a stretch, causing Mavis cruel anxiety and distress. While under the influence of drink I became a kleptomaniac, stealing any article of value upon which I could lay my hands."

"On the occasion in question, Mavis, to her horror, discovered that I had taken your diamond ring, the one kept in your dressing-case, and the key of which had been left carelessly lying about. She made inquiries, ascertained where I had pledged it, and, in her despair, not having sufficient money to reclaim the ring, she appealed to Luke Tressider—who was aware of my strange tendency—to assist her, rather than permit you to learn what I had done."

"He, touched by her distress, good-naturedly complied, although she had rejected him in your favour. They had regained possession of the ring, and were on their way home, Tressider intending to alight at the corner of the street when the horse bolted, and brought them under your notice."

Will Meredith remained silent. The mystery of the silk glove found in his room was solved at last.

"You know the rest," Sydney Neville went on. "How she let you go from her, deeming her false, rather than reveal the dishonourable act of which I had been guilty. She contrived to replace the ring in your dressing-case, and you never knew of its brief absence. When, in my remorse, I sought to lessen her sacrifice by self-accusation, she exacted a promise from me to remain silent."

"For a while I fought against the evil habit only to yield to it again, and by a strange fatality, to bring it under your notice. Can you forgive me the harm and misery I have wrought?"

"I will try," said Meredith, his face white and rigid. "Yet your daughter is about to marry Tressider!"

"Not Luke Tressider," corrected the dying man. "He got over his disappointment and married a pretty Scotch girl three months ago. Mavis has consented to marry a cousin of his, a wealthy man, many years older than herself, who has recently returned from abroad, in order to save me from ruin and beggary. But she does not love him, poor child. Her heart has been true to you, Meredith, all along, and I have well-nigh broken it."

Mavis, maledict and wrongly condemned—Mavis, loving, suffering, loyal, while he had deemed her false, calculating, worldly—Mavis

lost to him for ever through his own want of faith in her. A mist swam before Will Meredith's eyes, as he realized the truth, at once so sweet, and so inexorably sad.

"Oh, my love, my little love!" he cried aloud in his anguish. "If I could but undo the past! If we were but free to kneel at your feet and sue for pardon. Neville, your revelation has indeed come too late to save our happiness from being wrecked!"

CHAPTER VI.

SYDNEY NEVILLE was dead and in his grave, yet the harm he had wrought by means of his terrible vice of intemperance lived on in the world. They could not inter that with him, and read the burial service over it.

Mavis had been removed from her father's death-bed in a prostrate condition. Some gentle violence had been necessary in order to detach her hand from that lifeless one to which she clung so fondly. A severe illness followed the prolonged mental strain—the heart anguish she had endured so patiently for the sake of her beloved father.

Will Meredith in his fierce, unavailing regret and bitter self-reproach—his consciousness of what might have been but for his unreasoning jealousy in the past—seemed to live through an age of suffering at this period. He called daily at the house to inquire after Mavis, until she was declared to be out of danger. He prowled round it at night, watching the light in the sick-room, tormented by vehement unceasings longings and passionate regrets.

Mam'selle, softened by her previous favourite's penitence and remorse, had relented towards him.

It was she who brought him the latest news from the invalid's room, and revealed to him as they sat together, the extent of the girl's love and self-sacrifice, upon which her father had made such frequent demands during his lifetime.

Yet, although Mam'selle was kind and forgiving she could hold out no hope to the young artist. He could not have accepted it, indeed, had she done so. A double barrier existed now between him and the girl he loved. Her recently contracted engagement, and his own, severed them hopelessly.

As he was leaving the Villa one day he encountered Owen Tressider, Mavis' fiancé. Will Meredith could but admit the latter's superiority to his cousin Luke, both in appearance and intellect. Tall, erect, soldier-like in carriage, with a stern, bronzed, handsome face, dark penetrating eyes, and dark hair, slightly sprinkled with grey, Owen Tressider, although verging upon forty, was still an attractive man, far more so, indeed, than many of his juniors.

And Mavis had pledged herself to marry him without love! Would the stern, grave, handsome soldier ever discover this fact? Will Meredith asked himself, anxiously; and, if so, would he visit the discovery upon his young wife's head?

Even when she recovered, Mavis refused to grant her old lover an interview. It would but add to their mutual pain, she declared. If there was anything to forgive on her part, it had been forgiven long, long ago. Since the past was unalterable, since each had plighted a fresh troth, it would be useless—nay, wrong—for them to meet again; and no entreaties could induce her to swerve from this decision.

Not long after Sydney Neville's death Meredith met Luke Tressider in Piccadilly one day, looking more bluff and hearty, more aggressively prosperous than ever.

A vexed, embarrassed expression crossed the Cornishman's face as Will Meredith pulled him up.

"Tressider, I owe you an ample apology!" he said, quietly. "I insulted and misjudged you upon a certain occasion which you have not forgotten, and you displayed great forbearance at the time! An admission made by Sydney Neville previous to his death opened my eyes to the truth. I can only express my sincere regret for the attitude I adopted. It has cost me very dear!"

Luke Tressider's ruddy face cleared like the sun emerging from behind a cloud. He grasped the other's outstretched hand cordially.

"So he told you, did he? I'm glad of it," he exclaimed. "Neville was an awful beggar when out on the spree. That poor little girl of his was almost out of her mind when she came to me that night about the missing ring—you know. Of course I helped her to recover it, although I felt anything but friendly towards you at the time."

"It was a generous, self-sacrificing act on your part that I shall never forget," said Meredith. "I repaid it badly."

"Rubbish! We'll let bygones be bygones, old man. I hope you are going to marry Mavis Neville, since her father has made a clean breast of it? I'm married, don't you know, and out of the running, so I can afford to give you my good wishes. I should like to introduce you to my wife, if you will call upon us. No allusion to this little incident when she is present, though."

"Certainly not," rejoined Meredith, with a faint smile. "Neville's disclosure came too late, unfortunately, to set matters right between us. Mavis is engaged to be married to your cousin, Mr. Tressider. She will never be my wife."

Beatrice Millward went to Bournemouth in August, whether her fiancé was to follow her later on. They were to be married in November, and the idea of this marriage had become a perfect nightmare of late to Will Meredith.

The calm happiness, the mental rest he had once looked forward to sharing with Beatrice were lost sight of in futile regrets, since he knew that Mavis Neville had never faltered in her allegiance to him.

An overpowering desire to see her again ere he left town induced Meredith to call at Belmont Villa. But Mavis was not there. The caretaker informed him that Miss Neville and her aunt had gone to Bournemouth, for the benefit of the young lady's health.

(Continued on page 305)

HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY

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CHAPTER XXV.

SIR BASIL FANE flushed with shame as he thought of all his broken resolutions. They were gone as if they had never been framed and planned after long meditation with himself—the fruit of sleepless nights and solitary days spent in arguing against every whim of his heart.

His strong will had triumphed over his passion, and he had gone about for days a saddened man, incapable of enjoyment. Laughter had jarred on his nerves; the sound of music grew hateful to him, the society of women became irksome, and all because he had told himself that he was bound in honour to give up the hope of ever having Flora Trevanion for his wife.

And now, in one moment of excitement, all the barriers which he had been raising with firm but unwilling hands were broken down, and all the work of the last few days was undone.

He had gone too far to go back. His pulses bounded as he told himself that now he was obliged by every dictate of chivalry to go further still. He had passed the rubicon when he was mad enough to hold her in his arms, and to kiss her pure, sweet lips.

If he called himself a man of honour and a gentleman he must—whatever had gone before, and whatever might be coming after, he must give her the option of becoming his wife.

As he looked down on her, lying on the sofa where he had placed her, lying there like a broken flower, her sweet face pillowed on his arm, all the tenderness of his nature, long pent up behind the iron walls of self-denial, went out to her in a wave of intense emotion.

Her youth, her innocence, her purity appealed to him irresistibly. He loved her, not because she had a skin like a pale blush rose, eyes that

seemed to wile the heart out of one's breast, lips that seemed framed for kisses, and soft brown hair like dark brown silk, forming a trap for sunbeams, but because of her guileless nature, her utter unselfishness, her generous, warm-hearted ways, her devotion to her brother.

As he thought of all this his stern face softened wondrously; the hard lines seemed to melt away, and he looked for a brief space as he had looked—young, and happy, and careless—till Sir Lucius brought a curse upon his life.

It would not do to hurry her. He would wait with what patience he could command. She did not love him yet, but she should before long, unless women were different, or he himself was changed since a few years ago.

Rivers, thank Heaven, was out of the way, and might be absent for years.

A young man's fancy is easily altered by a change of scene and a change of face, and the chances were ten to one that before he was six months in India, or, perhaps, six weeks, he would have fallen head over ears in love with one of the few belles at his station.

Young men change, he thought, with calm contempt for the youth he had left behind him; whilst at thirty "girls may come and girls may go," but a man's heart is fixed for ever.

For ever! He felt it in every fibre of his heart; it would last through change and chance, through the shadows of sorrow and the sunlight of joy; it would go with him wherever he went, only increasing and gathering strength as the years went on, till he came to the end of struggles and hopes, till his passions were stilled by the chill of the grave.

Flora opened her eyes and looked full into his face wonderingly. As she met his glowing gaze her own fell, and she raised herself up hastily.

"Why am I not with Eustace?"

"Because you are not made of iron, and just at first the good news upset you," trying to speak calmly.

"Then it wasn't a dream—the doctors have been here!"

"And decided that the operation can be avoided."

She clasped her hands, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Tell me what they said."

"They said he was very weak, which we knew as well as they did. His strength must be kept up in every possible way, and the quieter he was the better."

"I suppose if it were quietly done it wouldn't hurt him to bring him to the Fire."

"The worst thing possible. If you want him to lose his leg that's the best way to insure it," speaking almost sternly.

Flora shivered.

"But he can't stay here for ever."

"Not for ever. Why should you want to hurry him away? There is every reason against it. This house, as I have told you so often, is bigger than the Fire, and therefore better for an invalid. It is Mrs. Madden's delight to cook up messes for the 'poor dear young gentlemen,' as she calls him, which the housekeeper at the Fire would not have time to do, and Trevanion, as he says himself, likes to be in a house where there are a few men about, instead of always being surrounded by petticoats."

"And I am of no account!" raising her eyebrows.

"You are here, or else I could not keep him," with a smile. "But I can see I shall have to find some more powerful magnet than your brother, or else you'll be off."

"You couldn't. Even if I bored you to death so long as Eustace is ill, I should have to cling to him."

"You are careful not to flatter me," with a slight bitterness in his tone, and a larger portion still in his heart.

"You would not believe me if I did. But now I must go to him."

"Will you believe me that I am almost as glad as you are about to-day?" going towards the door to open it.

"I know you are kindness itself," her lips trembling, "and no brother could have been more good to Eustace."

"But I am a brother—you forget."

"Oh, yes. Brother and friend—I think it must have been a special providence that sent you to this place."

"I know it was," and then it flashed across him that there was another way of looking at it, and he muttered to himself, as he looked after her slight figure vanishing down the corridor, "or else a temptation of the devil."

Instead of following her he turned into the hall, where his eyes fell on Frank Rivers' card with the word "Good-bye" scrawled across it.

"Mr. Rivers left that for Miss Trevanion, Sir Basil," said the butler, who happened to be standing close by, inspecting a number of coats which were hanging on a row of pegs against the wall, "and he was very particular that it should be given into the lady's own hands. Would you like to give it, sir, or shall I?"

"You may, but don't disturb Miss Trevanion just at present. She is with her brother."

Then Sir Basil passed on to the drawing-room which was in general use, not a state-room simply to be used when there was a reception.

There he found his aunt, as he had expected, for she always sat there when she came in from her drive. A five o'clock tea-table stood close beside her chair, but most of the cups had been used, and the cake and bread and butter were nearly exhausted.

He sat down and stretched out his hand as it to take hold of the handle of the teapot, but this scandalised Mrs. Fane, and she took possession of it instead, saying, with a smile,—

"Allow me the pleasure."

He watched her pour out his tea in silence—then he refused to eat anything, and after asking her how she enjoyed her drive, whether the roads were dusty, etc., etc., began the speech which he had been thinking over for the last ten minutes.

"You find Greylands suits you very well, doesn't it?"

"Admirably. I don't know when I ever felt better—my strength surprises me. I can drive without fatigue, and entertain your guests after my poor fashion," with a deprecating smile, "without suffering from a sleepless night."

"Delighted to hear it, because then you won't be hurrying away."

There was a pause which tried Sir Basil's patience. He did not care for his aunt, whom he considered artificial and insincere; but he was rabidly anxious for her to stay with him, as, if she went away, Flora Trevanion would go at the same time. Perhaps this was the reason why Mr. Philip Fane suggested to his mother that it would be better to move on, and not wear out a welcome.

Mr. Fane was in a difficulty. She liked her present quarters immensely. To all intents and purposes—that is to say pleasant purposes—she was mistress of a large establishment, without any expense to her own pocket. The cuisine was good, the stables were well filled, and there was always a carriage at her disposal. She felt rich, as if she had a large balance at her banker's; and the feeling without doubt is very pleasant, especially when it does not involve the drawbacks of a crowd of hangers-on, and an endless correspondence.

And as soon as she left Greylands she knew she would begin to be pinched, and doubtful how much she could afford. And yet she could not bear to offend Philip, who evidently had a strong reason for wishing her to go. What it was she could not imagine, for he rarely confided to her anything that she was not likely to find out. Perhaps the mystery was more effective than an honest explanation, for she was afraid of committing some fearful mistake, if she acted against his wishes, whilst being kept in the dark.

"Well, I don't know as to that," she answered, with a slight hesitation in her tone. "Philip has only reminded me this morning that I must not drop all my friends."

"I don't see why you should drop them because you happen to be staying at Greylands. Is it such a disreputable place that they are sure to cast you off?"

"Why, dear Basil, how can you be so ridiculous?"

I gain in importance by having the Abbey as my address. But you see I have so many engagements for the autumn, and I don't think it will do to throw them all over."

"Can't they be put off?"

"No, that would never do. You see I am a lonely widow whom nobody cares much about, so I must take my chance, and go when I'm invited."

"I should only go when I wanted to. Give up your visits for once, and make Greylands your home for the present."

"I only wish I could," in all sincerity, inwardly resolving that she would coax Philip to consent; "but you see if I gave up my visits, my friends would give me up as well. It is always so easy to be forgotten," with a melancholy smile.

"I wish it were. The hopes of the present generation will be unpinched. Now consent to stay till the middle of September!"

"Impossible, I'm afraid," with a sigh, as she longed after the fleshpots of Egypt; "but I will see what Philip thinks about it."

"You are your own mistress. No need to consult any one but yourself; Philip is sure to be here for the shooting."

"That's very different; but believe me, whether I go or stay, I am equally grateful for your hospitality."

"Not at all," and he rose from his seat with a cloud on his face, for he foresaw what Philip would say.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"No, mother, I know Basil better than you do. A stiff fellow made of buckram, who would ask you to stay out of politeness, and then call Heaven and earth to witness behind your back that you stuck to him like a limpet; and Philip having enunciated this opinion leant his back against the marble mantelpiece, put his hands in his pocket, and whistled a tune under his breath.

"But he wanted me to stay, really. He was so earnest about it that I could scarcely refuse. As it was, I said I would ask you, simply as a way out of it."

"Glad to hear of it. I am doing some good down here, at any rate. Say that you must go in a week's time."

"Say a fortnight, Philip," she pleaded earnestly.

"A week's too long; you must not stay one day beyond. I have my reasons, and one day you will thank me. In that day, mother, you will come to Greylands as much as you like, but not on Basil's invitation."

"What do you mean?" opening her eyes in languid surprise. She did not care much about that day far in the distance, but she did care much about the fortnight out of which she meant to wheedle him. To the outer world there might seem no reason why she shouldn't rebel, and stay on at Greylands till Sir Basil married, and his bride ousted her out of her comfortable position; but Philip had got his mother into excellent training, and it was rarely indeed that she ever crossed his will. She would make a show of resistance, but she never had the courage to keep it up. When she had gone a little distance a sudden terror would come over her, and she would turn back in a violent hurry with flittering nerves.

"What I mean will be patent to you some day, and require no explanation. By staying on here you may ruin my prospects, and indirectly injure yourself. Now do exactly as you like."

"What is the good of telling me that?" rusefully, as she took up a newspaper. "Do I want to ruin my son, or to injure myself? though what you mean by either I can't imagine."

"If I were you I should write to Lady Frogmore, and fix the day. There's nothing like having a settled date to fall back on."

"I don't know if Lady Frogmore will expect me."

"She must, when you say you are coming. Come, mother, you have done very well without

Greylands all these years, I don't see why it should become a necessity to you. If Basil hadn't been the most selfish dog that ever existed he might have lent it to you and me for the last five years."

"But he scarcely knew anything of me," recollecting the time when Sir Basil was the poorer of the two, and scarcely ever received an invitation to his uncle's house in Connaught-square.

"He knew you were his aunt, at least by marriage, and that ought to have been enough for him; but, as I said before, he is selfish to the core, and only notices you when he wants to make use of you."

There was not a more selfish man than Philip Fane in the world, and his cousin was one of the least; and yet he really thought he was speaking the truth, because Sir Basil did not give him his whole fortune as a present. He paid his debts, but had not bought his gratitude; for a mean nature generally hates its benefactor. And the more Sir Basil did for his cousin, the less he seemed to admire him. Even now, when living under his roof, Philip was ready in league himself with the lowest scum of the earth in order to be able to do him an ill turn, and for the sake of satisfying his greed of wealth would deprive him, if he could, of the chance of marrying.

In spite of Sir Basil's solemn assertion that he meant to remain a bachelor, Philip was certain that, unless some lucky chance prevented it, he would marry Flora Trevanion; and as he intended her for his own bride, and nobody else's, this was rather aggravating.

First, she must be made to leave Greylands, so as to put a stop to the dangerous interviews in the octagon-room, at which he had no chance of interfering; and then, when she was back at the Firs, the field would be as open for him as for his cousin. If the worst came to the worst he would play his last card, and face the storm that would ensue. But this could be only a *dernier ressort*, and meanwhile the baronet, with his insidious plea of platonic friendship, was making way.

As Mrs. Fane bowed to her son's will, and said she must depart, Flora, rather against her will, for she could not bear to tear herself away from Eustace, came to the conclusion that she could not stay in a house where there was no other lady to keep her in countenance.

It was the day before she was going away that Sir Basil came into the cheerful room, where she was sitting with her brother, and asked to speak to her alone.

"Don't be long," said Eustace, as she rose from her chair, with a heightened colour.

"I shall be back directly," she said, with a nod and a smile, then followed Sir Basil to the octagon-room.

"Don't look frightened. I've no bad news for you, only I've kept back something that Sir Cavendish Brown said, and I think it is time to tell it. He said—looking down into her eager, upturned face, breathless with anxiety—"that he thought there was some chance of a cure—understand me, a permanent cure—if a certain operation could be performed. He could not undertake it except in London."

"But how could he go there?" her face falling.

"Easily enough. Trust him to me, and he and I will take possession of the family mansion in Eaton-square. Mrs. Madden shall go with us, and he shall have every care. Now what difficulty are you going to make?"

"You are too kind—I don't know how to thank you," her face flushing, her eyes full of tears. "But—but—Mr. Willoughby told me an operation cost such a heap of money, and we have nothing. Of course I'd starve, or go out as a governess, rather than let anything stand in Eustace's way; but even if I did, and saved up all my salary, it would be years before it grew to hundreds."

"Do you think I'd allow it? Child, what do you think I am made of? Didn't you promise that I should be your brother?" If the word means anything prove it now. Give Eustace to me for a few weeks. Don't ask any questions, don't trouble your little head about ways and

means, only give me my way, and before a month is out I return him cured, and then you shall thank me if you will."

"Thank you! I will bless you till the last day of my life," her sweet face all aglow, her lips trembling. "But if ever we come into our own again, as Eustace says, you will let us repay you, won't you?"

"You shall repay me long before then, but there shall never be a question of pounds, shillings and pence between us," taking her hands in his. "What shall I do without you to-morrow, and the day after, and the day after that?"

"Your other friends will see a little more of you, that's all. But do you mean that Eustace will ever be really well—quite like other people?" scarcely able to credit the good news.

"I hope so, but it will take time, and you must not be impatient. Will you ever think of me instead of him?" the old jealousy in his heart.

"Not instead," with a smile. "I've two brothers now, and I think of them both."

"Didn't you say once that you would love anyone who cared Eustace?" watching her expression with anxious, eager eyes.

"Yes—" a smile rippling over her face—"but that would be awkward for Lady Fane."

He started, not seeing at first what the meant, but afterwards he smiled.

"There is no Lady Fane."

"No, or she might object to your being my brother. Oh, Sir Basil, when you come back I shall worship the ground you tread on!"

He hid the rapture in his face by stooping to kiss her hands.

She caught them away with a shy blush.

"Brothers don't do that sort of thing."

"No, I fancy they do something more," looking at her with mischievous eyes. "I only lacked the courage, not the wish."

"Sir Basil!" and she jumped up from her seat with crimson cheeks.

"It was you who suggested it."

"I didn't. But don't let us talk nonsense when we've got so much to think of. When shall you start?"

"As soon as Mr. Willoughby gives us permission."

"Oh, what will he say? I had forgotten him."

"He will have no right to stand in his ward's way."

"But—but," looking down on the ground, "he will think I have no pride if I accept such an obligation."

"He would understand that there could never be a question of obligation between you and me."

"What will the world say?"

"If they know anything about it, they will envy Basil Fane."

She looked up at him with startled eyes.

"Why?"

"I'll leave you to guess," with a low bow. And whether she guessed or no she went back with a fluttering heart to her brother.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"POPPI, you've bewitched the catch of the county," remarked Mr. Willoughby, as he came back from a visit to the Abbey.

Fiona had returned to the Firs, and was trying to settle down into the quiet ways of old; but she felt as if there were a change in everything. Mrs. Willoughby treated her with more consideration, Emily with more animosity, Jans with more friendliness. The reason for all this she could not guess, although Mrs. Willoughby would have thought her decidedly wanting in intelligence.

"You are talking nonsense," with a smile, as she came and sat close by her guardian's armchair; "and I am dying to know what has been settled. You haven't said 'no'?"

"No, I haven't said it, because I'm not a fool, and, as Fane says, I have no right to stand in the boy's light; but I don't like it. If it hadn't

been for the girls I'd rather have taken it out of my own pocket."

"Oh, guard! how good you are!" giving his arm an affectionate squeeze. "It does not matter so very much, because we are certain to be able to pay it back some day."

"You will pay it back I know, child, and it is that which worries me. That Philip Fane has an odd way of talking of his cousin."

"Never mind him, he's a horrid man. Sir Basil pays his debts over and over again, but he repays him with the basest ingratitude."

"The way of the world. Caress a cur and he'll bite, kick him and he'll sink away. But Sir Basil isn't a cur by any means. Caress him, and he'll give it back with interest; oh, Fie!"

"He is the kindest man that ever lived," turning away to hide the rose in her cheeks. "But why do you look so grave? Are you keeping anything back?"

"This operation is a serious business, and I don't know how the boy's strength will stand it. I can't say I like his going away with a comparative stranger."

"Oh! couldn't I go?" clasping her hands. "If it's not there I shall fancy they are killing him."

"Sir Basil does not fancy going without you. He says Eustace will want you so desperately."

"Couldn't I have a lodgings close by—so close that I could go to him every day?"

"Impossible! I couldn't leave my wife whilst Seadman's away, and nothing would induce my wife. Child, there is only one way, and Sir Basil will tell it to you to-morrow."

"Where?" eagerly.

"Here, but in your own sitting-room. I don't know what is best, but I do know that I shall feel horribly dull without my Poppy."

"But it won't be for long, and I shall come back so happy," laying her cheek against his.

"It won't be the same child, and the Abbey isn't the Firs. Now go away; I must look over these papers, and I can't get you out of my thoughts so long as you are sitting there."

She gave him a kiss and went away, thinking over what he had said about Eustace. A grave risk! Oh! what if it were better never to take it! If—if anything happened would she ever forgive herself?

"You never say Frank!" asked Emily, as they met on the stairs. "He came here, and then we sent him on to the Abbey."

"No; it was the day the doctors came. I've got his card with his last good-bye, but I don't suppose he will be away for very long."

"Ten years, very likely," with a grave little nod.

"Ten years!" turning pale. "Poor fellow." Then she went upstairs, and pulling out the card which she kept in her work-basket, looked sadly at the one word scrawled across it. When and how would they meet again?

The next day there was a stir and a subdued titter in the house, and the two girls kept watching Flora Trevanion as if she were the interesting heroine of a drama. She was dressed in her usual simple cotton, with a *Gloire de Dijon* close under her chin, and stared when Mrs. Willoughby suggested that she had better put on her cashmere.

"But why? What is going to happen?"

"I thought you knew Sir Basil was coming," with unusual solemnity.

"Yes; but he won't think about my dress."

"Very well, my dear; perhaps you know best."

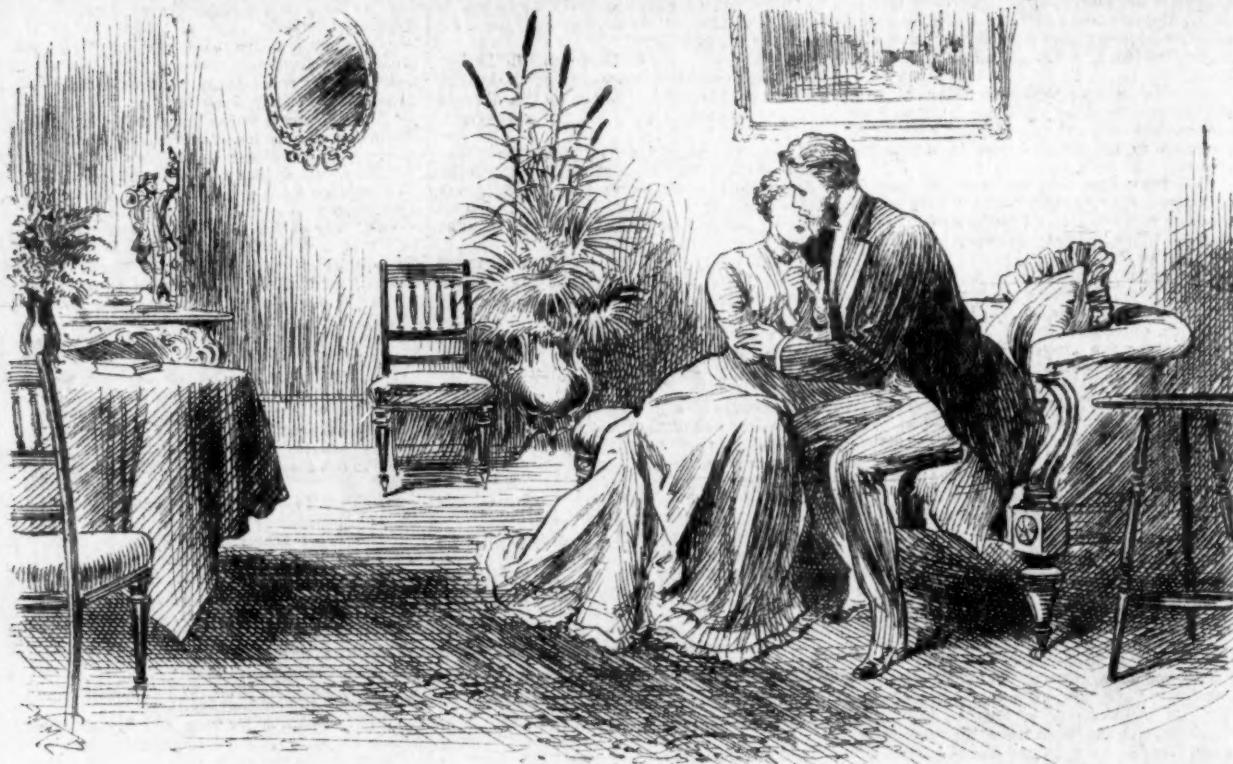
And she turned into the drawing-room, whilst Flora ran to her little den, where she could think out this dreadful problem about Eustace.

She must be with him; of that she was quite certain. It would send her mad to know he was undergoing all sorts of dreadful things in London. While she was far away Sir Basil would think of a way; her guardian had said so.

Presently she went out into the garden, and picked some roses, which she brought back and laid upon the table whilst she emptied the vases.

She was standing up, with a rose in her hand, when there was a knock at the door, and Sir Basil came in.

After they had shaken hands he looked round the small room with interest, taking in every



"GIVE YOURSELF TO ME, DARLING, AND YOU SHALL NEVER REGRET IT!"

detail, from the picture of Mrs. Trevanion on the wall to the shabby Schiller lying amongst the roses.

"So this is where your life is spent when you are not with him?"

"Yes; it is a dear little room, isn't it?"

"I don't see much to admire," raising his eyebrows, "except a few family treasures, which I'm glad to see are movable."

Flora wondered why he cared whether they were fixtures or not.

"Sit down on this; it's Eustace's chair."

"Thanks, I prefer this sofa, as I want you to come and sit by my side. I've got something to say to you."

She sat down, her heart in a flutter, and he took his place beside her, but seemed in no hurry to speak, so she began, with precipitation,—

"Have you decided anything more about Eustace?"

"We are waiting for you," turning round and facing her. "There is a risk. I don't deny it, though Cavendish Brown's so confident. Eustace is wild to have it tried. He says life is worthless to him at the present rate, and I can quite understand it."

"Yes, I know it," large tears welling in her eyes. "It's so hard for a man. Every day of my life I've wished and wished that we could change places."

"I'm very glad you can't. I believe you would sacrifice every hope in life for the sake of that boy."

"And so I ought. You can't understand how I always feel that I ought to make up for his being lame; at least, as far as I can."

"I think I do. You don't like the thought of being away from him whilst this is being done?"

"No; if it is possible I must be there," clasping her hands tight together. "I should go mad if I were kept down here."

"You shall come, dear!" leaning his arm on the back of the sofa, and letting his eyes rest on her lovely, troubled face.

"Mr. Willoughby said you would tell me a way," looking up at him hopefully, for he had never failed her.

"Don't you know what it is?" his voice growing husky, a flush rising to his temples.

She shook her head.

"You must come as my wife!"

"Oh! no, no," shrinking back in dismay. "You told me—"

"I told you what!"

"You told me that I was to be your sister."

"I said so, but it couldn't be. A man of stone might have managed it."

She covered her face with her hands, her poor brain in a whirl. She had felt so safe with him lately, so free and unconstrained, because he was a brother, not a lover; and now the lover was in the foreground, and the brother nowhere. She owed him everything, even that precious life which now it was so hard to risk. She might owe him in the future Eustace's return to health and strength. Could anything be too much to do for him! Hadn't she once promised that she would do everything he asked? Her heart was so overflowing with gratitude, why did it turn so cold now? She must love him. She had often said he was the best friend that she ever knew. Why should Frank's blue eyes seem to be looking into hers reproachfully? He was only a boy; he would soon forget her; he had never even said that he loved her.

"Answer me," almost harshly, as his voice quivered with strong emotion. "Good Heaven! have I made a mistake? Don't you love me? Say 'yes' or 'no,' for Heaven's sake," as he tried to take her hands away; "I can't wait."

"I do love you, indeed I do!" as if appealing against a voice within.

He put his arm slowly round her, and drew her towards him.

"Give yourself to me, darling, and you shall never forget it."

Could she say "no" with Eustace's fate hanging in the balance? And what could she want more. Here was the noblest man she knew

ready to help and to guard her through life; and she had felt so lonely before. She felt as if being pulled two ways at once. Then Sir Basil's voice in keenest reproof smote upon her heart.

"Child, do you hesitate still?"

And the next minute her small head dropped on his shoulder, and the next his eager lips met hers. With that long passionate kiss her fate was sealed, and she had placed herself for weal or woe in Sir Basil's hands. He did not say much, but he held her close against his throbbing heart, and felt as if it must burst with joy.

His life for five or six long years had known no peace—no happiness, but now to his eager eyes it looked like a blaze of sunlight, with all the gloom cast far behind. Ah! would Heaven only grant that after the day of sorrow there should be light in the evening-tide!—for her sake not for his.

Sir Basil received the congratulations of the Willoughbys, and then went back to tell Eustace that he had won his sister. The boy shook his hand nearly off, and said "It was the jolliest lark out"; and when it came to Mrs. Madden's ears, she pulled out her handkerchief and cried for joy. One person swore under his breath, but contented himself outwardly with a sneer.

"I knew you would do it, so why did you try to make a fool of me?"

After dinner Mr. Philip Fane took out a cigar, and said he was going for a stroll. His stroll took him beyond the park gates, and as far as the Piers, where he pulled the bell, and asked in a hoarse voice for Miss Trevanion. As the lamp-light fell upon his cold, keen face, it was white with passion.

(To be continued)

LIONS and tigers are too weak in lung-power to run more than half a mile.



"YOU ARE FRESH AND FAIR AS THE MORNING ITSELF, MISS EGERTON!" HE SAID.

THE MISTRESS OF LYNWOOD.

—10— CHAPTER VII.

NATHALIE EGERTON was standing at the window of the breakfast-room, looking out across the park, and watching the tremulous play of the shadows on the smooth green turf, as the wind swept daintily amongst the leaves, and shook them gently together. A smile was on her scarlet lips, a tender light in the glorious dark eyes, and her fingers, as they twirled nervously one in the other, hinted that she was not less excited than happy.

The fact was, her lover had just entered her father's study, and she was awaiting, with vivid impatience, the moment when he should come out and inform her of the result of the interview.

She did not for one moment doubt what it would be, although she thought it very probable that Mr. Egerton would veto all idea of marriage until Cleveland's position had improved, and to this she would have no objection, for, dearly as she loved Hugh, her affection for her home was well nigh as great, and she could not think of leaving it without a pang.

"I wonder if he's as excited as I am," she murmured to herself, leaning out of the window, and pressing her face against a dewy gloire de Dieu that grew against it. "Byron says 'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart; 'tis woman's whole existence!' But if one is to believe what one's lover says, it is at least as much to him as to oneself."

And then she fell musing, as girls will muse, her thoughts being too delicate and impalpable to put into words, as they floated in dim fancies through her brain. Romantic—as the word is generally accepted—she was not, or, perhaps, it would be truer to say she was not sentimental, for there may have been a mixture of romance in her devoted love of her home and her father, and the strict sense of duty she cherished next

faithfully to her religion; indeed, duty was part of her religion and not the least important part either.

If, through her country education, she had lost certain advantages enjoyed by those who live in London, she had, on the other hand, gained some sort of compensation in the pure, free, and healthy life she led at King's Dene. It had strengthened her both mentally, morally, and physically; braced her nerves and lent her powers of endurance that many a man might have envied her the possession of. Of late, Mr. Egerton had insensibly come to lean on her, to depend on her judgment, in which he had the utmost confidence, and to take her decision as final even in cases where he himself held an opposite view; and Nathalie grew to know this, and with the knowledge came a consciousness of her father's weakness, and a certain protecting tenderness towards him that contained more of a maternal than filial element.

As she leaned out of the casement a shadow fell on the terrace, and looking up she saw Mr. Farquhar.

She drew back with an involuntarily repellent gesture that he, however, did not notice.

She was wondering how much longer this guest of her father's would remain at King's Dene, for, truth to tell, she was not by any means prepossessed in his favour, and the sooner she said good-bye to him the better pleased she would be.

"You are as fresh and fair as the morning itself, Miss Egerton!" he exclaimed, in the style of florid compliment he usually affected. "The roses in the garden lose in comparison with those in your cheeks."

"Pray spare me your flattery, Mr. Farquhar. Have I not already told you I object to them, however delicately they are administered!"

He did not see the satire in the last sentence, if he had, he would probably have been little affected by it.

"You must get used to them with a view to the future, for when you are presented at Court,

and mistress of a house in Park-lane, you will speedily find the great world at your feet."

"It is a distinction I do not crave."

"And yet you are ambitious," he observed, shrewdly.

"Indeed! What has led you to suppose so?"

"Simply the indications I have remarked in your character. Do you know, Miss Egerton, I am a student of human nature, and yours is a most interesting study."

"I was not aware of either fact," she returned, with supreme indifference, and wishing he would leave her.

But of this he had not the slightest intention, and in order to carry on the conversation with more ease he leaned his elbow on the window-sill, thus forcing her to retreat a little to one side.

She could not leave him without positive rudeness; and this, considering she was his hostess, she was most averse to have recourse to. But in spite of all her endeavours to appear calm, her manner grew flurried and anxious as the minutes passed by and Cleveland did not come, and of this Farquhar was quietly cognisant, though he did not appear to notice it.

Presently a door was shut quickly, then footsteps rang on the marble of the hall, and a minute later, Hugh Cleveland issued from the principal entrance, his eyes downcast, his attitude the very reverse of a triumphant lover's.

As he was going down the steps that led to the avenue, he paused, looked round, and his eyes fell on the two at the window, Farquhar resting familiarly on the sill, and smiling up into Nathalie's face, and at the sight the young artist's lips compressed themselves sternly together, and he passed on, raising his hat in token of recognition, but giving no indication of any desire to speak to Nathalie, who grew quite white and stopped in the middle of a reply she was making to some observation of her companion's.

"You don't look very well. I expect the heat of the morning has overcome you," he remarked. "Shall I get you some water?"

"Oh, yes; do please," she answered, eagerly, thinking that while he was away she might take the opportunity of running after Hugh, and asking him why he was leaving without a word to her.

But Farquhar, perhaps guessing her intention, gave her no chance of effecting it, for he sprang lightly through the window, and poured out a glass of water from a carafe standing on a side table; then, after handing it to her, took up a large Japanese fan and waved it to and fro.

"I believe I am getting quite a lady's man," he remarked, laughing cynically. "I have to thank you for initiating me, Miss Egerton."

"I was not aware I had done so."

"Probably not. Your work has proved the more effectual because it was unconscious."

Nathalie's impatience at length overcame her, and heedless of what her companion might think, she made a hasty apology for leaving him and went to the front door to look down the avenue.

Hugh had made such good use of his time that he was now out of sight; and, with a strange pang at her heart, Nathalie entered her father's study, where she found him resting his head on his hand, apparently in deep meditation. He raised his eyes as she came in.

"Shut the door and sit down," he said. "I was about sending for you; I want to talk to you."

She obeyed and took a chair opposite him.

"Mr. Cleveland has just been here," he began, rather nervously, and balancing an ivory paper-knife on his finger while he was speaking. "I presume you know the object of his visit?"

The blush on the girl's cheek was sufficient answer.

"He came to ask my permission to his becoming your affianced husband," went on Mr. Egerton, carefully abstaining from meeting her eyes; "and when I asked him his income, he told me with engaging frankness that he hadn't any, but hoped, in the course of a few years, to secure one by achieving fame in his profession."

"And you!" exclaimed Nathalie, breathlessly, while she leaned forward—"what did you say?"

"I believe I said what any father in my position would have said—namely, that I thought the offer extremely presumptuous on his part. And, indeed, the young man's opinion of himself must be very considerable, otherwise he would hardly suppose it likely that a girl would wait till the bloom was off her beauty, and all her best days had passed by, in order to eventually become the wife of a struggling artist!"

"And you insulted him by telling him this!"

"I did not insult him; on the contrary, I treated him with the courtesy that was due to my position, although hardly to his. I told him I had other views for you, and that I was quite sure, when I had talked to you, you would see the folly of which you had both been guilty in imagining the possibility of a marriage between you."

It was quite clear to Nathalie that these words were the result of some line of conduct her father had determined to pursue, and not the spontaneous expression of his own sentiments.

She had felt all along that the idea of her engagement to the artist would be repugnant to him; but, for all that, she imagined that, putting her happiness first, he would set aside all thoughts of the more brilliant match he had fancied she would make, and consent to her engagement.

There was a certain obstinacy inherent in Mr. Egerton's character, as there is in that of all weak men, of which she was quite aware, and which she dreaded; for it was of that unreasoning kind that, once resolved, is most difficult to overcome.

She did not speak for a few minutes, and he continued,—

"Mr. Cleveland is almost a stranger to me. I have only met him once or twice, and, therefore, it was easier to speak candidly; and I think I convinced him of the folly of his request. Moreover, I did not scruple to tell him that I was a poor man myself, and had not a farthing to bestow on you in the way of dowry. No doubt this communication had some effect on him, for

it is likely enough he supposed I should give you a very substantial marriage portion."

"Indeed, no!" exclaimed his daughter, indignantly. "Poor he may be, but mercenary he certainly is not."

Mr. Egerton smiled with some cynicism. His knowledge of human nature induced him to place less confidence in it than she did.

"Well, we need not discuss that point, as it is quite immaterial now the affair is ended."

"But it is not ended," said Nathalie, with quiet deliberation, "it is only just beginning. You forget, papa, that I am not a child, who does not know her own mind, and allows herself to be governed by a despotic authority—but a woman, with a woman's feelings, a woman's heart, and a woman's determination. I love Hugh Cleveland, and I will not give him up."

Her father started in astonishment at the calm resolution of her tone. Heretofore, even when he had given way to her, he had been under the impression that his influence over her was paramount, and that in all important points she would be quite willing to yield to him without demur. The shock of finding it otherwise was not a pleasant one.

"Do you mean, Nathalie, that you defy my authority?"

"I should not have put it in that way, papa, but I certainly hold strong opinions on this point, and I shall as certainly set up to them," she replied, steadily. "Marriage, to me, a thing so sacred, that no one—not even a parent—has the right to interfere, for it concerns two people alone; and they, if they have arrived at years of discretion, as Hugh and I have, should be guided entirely by their feelings."

"But, my dear, consider what your future would be, linked to that of a penniless artist!"

"I have thought of it. There will be difficulties, no doubt, and at first I may think them hard, but in the end I shall conquer them. Besides, Hugh's profession will bring him wealth in time."

"In time—yes, when your eyes are dim and your hair is grey! Ah! Nathalie, riches fly away in less time than they are gathered," he said, with a groan. "I have seen people set out on life's poverty-stricken road with brave hearts and bright faces; but ere long the hearts have been weighed down with care, the gay footsteps have faltered, the bright faces have grown gray and despairing. Heaven preserve you from such a fate!"

The tenderness of his voice had more effect on her than his previously resolute tone, and in a moment she had slipped on her knees by his side, and pressed his hand to her lips.

"Don't let anything come between us, papa!" she exclaimed, pathetically. "We have always loved each other so well, and we have been so much to each other, that I could not bear the suspicion of a shadow between us."

"Nor I either, my Nathalie; only you know the bright dreams I have formed of your future. You are so handsome, and I have always been anxious for you to shine in the great world you are so fitted to adorn, and where the beauty of your ancestresses have made them famous. I have thought so much of the tarnished glories of our race being revived in you and your children."

Nathalie was silent for a few minutes. Farquhar had not been wrong when he declared her ambitious. Her girlhood had been nourished on visions of the future, when, by her agency, the fallen fortunes of the Egertons would be relieved, and it says much for the power of her love that it had banished these bright fancies, and given her courage to brave poverty and its attendant hardships by its own might.

"It," went on her father, "I were a wealthy man, and could give you an ample dowry, I would say marry whoever you like, whether rich or poor is perfectly immaterial, so that you follow the dictates of your own heart; but, unfortunately, this is not the case, and there are many considerations to be thought of relative to your marriage. Do not think me selfish, Nathalie—but I have depended so much on you in the past, I depend so much on you now."

"Thank you, selfish, dear!" she repeated,

rubbing his hand softly against her fresh young cheek. "How can I be otherwise than pleased, or do otherwise than strive to justify your confidence! You know it has been the pleasure of my life to help you—to share your burdens."

"Yes, and you have done so—you only, Lionel has been away so much that he knows little of my affairs, nothing of my embarrassments, and I had hoped—I had hoped to be able to keep him ignorant of them."

The young girl raised her head in some surprise. She knew nothing of Farquhar's proposals, or of the dreams to which it had given birth in her father's mind.

"But would it have been possible to keep him ignorant, papa?" she questioned.

"Yes, if certain conditions had been fulfilled. I cannot tell you," he added, passionately, "how deeply I dread being humiliated before my son—I would rather face the world than Lionel! You can form no conception of the agony of abasement I shall suffer!"

She pressed his hand in silent sympathy, her own eyes misted over with tears. Presently she said, softly,

"But is it possible to avert this, papa?"

"It is possible."

"How?"

"By your agency."

"Mine!" she echoed, greatly astonished. "You know I would do anything to prevent your suffering."

"Do you mean that, Nathalie! Are you quite sure!"

"Quite—quite sure. How can you doubt me?"

"Because she test is a hard one."

"The harder the better!" she exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "It would be no test at all if it were an easy one."

There was a pause, during which he looked at her intently, then he shook his head.

"I do not know whether I have a right to demand such a sacrifice from you."

"You have a right to demand whatever sacrifice you will; and, believe me, I shall not hesitate to make it if by so doing I secure your welfare and that of Lionel."

"Not if you have to give up Hugh Cleveland!"

Her face fell, and the ardent expression it had worn a minute ago completely faded. This was a contingency which had not prevented itself to her.

"Give up Hugh!" she faltered, clasping her hands together. "I had not thought of that. How can my relations with him affect you in this way?"

"I will tell you, and then you shall judge for yourself," said Mr. Egerton hastily, and in a few words as possible he acquainted her with Farquhar's proposal.

She was so completely surprised—so stunned, in fact, by the unexpectedness of the revelation—that it rendered her absolutely speechless.

"Since he first spoke to me on the subject he has altered the conditions," went on the Squire, very quickly, as if he wished to get the matter off his mind as soon as possible; "and now he says that so long as I live I need pay him no interest for the money he has advanced, and he will accept the principal by instalments. So you see, Nathalie, that I might be able, in my lifetime, to pay off the mortgage, and leave the estates quite unencumbered for those who come after me. He is so rich—a few thousands, more or less, are nothing to him."

He waited a few moments, but she did not speak, and then he continued,—

"If I thought that by becoming his wife you would be anything but happy I would not urge it, but this I do not believe. He is one of the most successful of financiers, and is received in good society, where you would be enabled to take your proper place and become a queen of fashion. He sincerely admires—nay, loves you!"

"Hush!" said Nathalie, with a gesture full of scorn. "We are not talking of love, remember, so do not let us profane the word by introducing it."

Mr. Egerton's head sank, and a faint flush rose

to his cheek. By ^{so} 'p' try he had tried to persuade himself his daughter's happiness would be best secured by a marriage with Farquhar, and it was not agreeable to have this pleasing vision dispelled.

"I do not wish to force your inclinations," he said, humbly, "and, of course, the decision rests entirely with you—whatever you decree I shall abide by; only I beg of you to take time and weigh well the circumstances of the case"—his natural selfishness came to the fore again, and he exclaimed,—"but, oh, Nathalie, think well before rejecting an offer which would be my salvation, and save the lands that our fathers have held for so many years passing into the possession of strangers, and we ourselves from being thrown penniless on the world! It is not only my welfare you have to consider, but that of Lionel, and the stainlessness of our name as well."

She rose from her kneeling position, her face quite white, her lips set and stern-looking—as different from the rosy-cheeked Nathalie of an hour ago as it is possible to imagine. Her voice when she spoke was very hard and cold:

"I will not judge hastily, papa, but will give the case all the attention it deserves, and let you know my decision in the course of a few days. What it will be I cannot at present say, but I hope Heaven will guide me aright, and let me think as much of you and Lionel as of myself—and—and Hugh."

And then, without another word, she passed from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME three or four months previously to the date at which this story opens, two people were sitting in the clean-looking little kitchen of a cottage situated in one of the midland counties.

They were a man and a woman, both young, and the latter distinguished by a particular neatness of dress, hair, and general appearance.

She was a girl of about nineteen or twenty, not pretty, but having steady grey eyes, and smooth bands of silken brown hair braided quietly round her head.

Her complexion was pale, but there was a certain sweetness in her expression that amply compensated for the plainness of the features. She was busily employed on some embroidery, in and out of which her needle flew with singular swiftness.

Her companion, who—a book open on the table before him—was watching her deft fingers, was some eight or ten years older, and seemed from his appearance to be a mechanic—as, indeed, he was.

Outside, the night was a wild one; the wind was tearing through the branches, and scattering the twigs on the ground by force of its might.

It howled round the cottage, shook the shutters, and made its way through all the cracks and crevices to such a degree that the flame of the tallow candle on the table flickered unsteadily. In the draught, while every now and again rain came beating against the little panes of glass in the door as if it would speedily batter them in.

"What a night!" exclaimed the girl, with a slight shudder, as a gust, stronger than usual, sent the smoke down the chimney. "I'm sorry for anyone unlucky enough to be out in it."

"Aye; you may well say that; but no one who has a shelter is likely to leave it in such weather," responded the young man, filling a clay pipe with tobacco. "It's only poor homeless wanderers who have no place to go to that'll suffer from it."

His own words seemed to suggest some idea, for he looked up suddenly and met the girl's eyes, which were filled with an intelligence that intimated she too had been struck by the same thought.

"Whenever I hear the wind sighin' and sobbin' like that it always reminds me of her," he went on, in a lower tone, "for it's for all the world like a woman's voice cryin' out in pain."

The girl sighed deeply. "I wonder where she is—I or if she is alive!"

"She's alive right enough," he responded,

decisively; "if she had died I should have known it."

"How?" asked his companion, pausing in her work to look up at him.

He put his hand to his left side.

"Somethin' here would have told me. No, she is alive, and, more than that, she will come back to us again. You mark my words, Lucy."

"So you have always said, Joe, and I haven't believed you," she returned, shaking her head, and letting her sewing lie unheeded on her lap. "Joyce was always proud, from the time she was a child; and if—if things are as we fear, she'll never let us know her shame."

"Joyce was proud, I know; but she loved her home, and all of us, and when she finds herself forsaken she'll creep back to her old nest. She knows we should never turn her away, and she knows, too, that as long as I have health and strength to work she never need want."

There was a slight pause; then the girl said, hesitatingly, and without lifting her eyes—

"I've wanted to ask you a question, Joe, for ever so long, but, somehow, I haven't liked to—"

"Ask it lass. We've known each other too long for one to take offence at what 't other says."

"Yes, I think so. Then I want to know whether—whether your feelings towards Joyce are just the same as they used to be?"

She looked at him anxiously, and held her breath until he answered.

"Just the same, Lucy; the same now, and the same always. I've loved her since she was a little maid no higher than this table; and I shall love her to the end of my life."

"But, Joe, she never cared for you—at least in that way."

"I know she didn't, lass; but that made no difference to my caring for her," he responded, simply. "That's a very poor sort of love that only exists for the return that's made it. It's quite enough for me that I love her. You wait until you know what love is, Lucy, and then you'll be able to understand my feelings better."

A burning flush rose to the girl's cheek, and an observer might have fancied that she already knew something of the subject spoken of; but she applied herself very diligently to her work, and did not reply to his remark.

"You see, she was such a handsome lass, was Joyce, and so full of fire and spirit," he went on, meditatively, "there was no other girl in the village at all like her, and it's small wonder that, bein' her cousin, and brought up with her, as you may say, I should grow to love her better than anything else in the world. I never used to mind her proud spirit and saucy words, because she was such a beauty. Her black eyes used to flash like stars when she was angry. I think I see her this minute standing there with her red lips and her rosy cheeks, looking for all the world like a queen. 'Ab, me!' he sighed, as he concluded, and puffed away at his pipe very vigorously to prevent Lucy from seeing his agitation.

Poor Lucy! Romances are not confined to palaces and wealthy maidens; and this cottage girl had given her young heart to her cousin Joe almost before she was old enough to understand the meaning of love.

For his part, so far from encouraging her, he had always treated her with the quiet affection of a brother, and had spent all the passion in his nature on her handsome sister, Joyce, who, nearly a year ago, had run away from home, without leaving a word in explanation of her flight, or as a means of discovering where she had gone.

Since then nothing had been heard of her, and both Lucy and her poor, bedridden mother had given up all hopes of ever seeing her again.

Joe, alone, with the dog-like fidelity that was part of his nature, had never lost faith in the return of his erring love, and all the dreams of his life were fixed on this one future event.

Lucy glanced at the little American clock ticking over the fireplace.

"It only wants a quarter to ten," she observed, folding up her embroidery, and putting it tidily

away in a small leather case; "hadn't we better go to bed?"

"Wait another quarter of an hour. I shall be ready when ten strikes," rejoined Joe and Lucy obediently acquiesced.

They did not talk; he smoked, while she sat with folded hands, staring intently into the glowing embers of the fire.

"Do you ever see faces in the fire, Joe?" she asked, presently, rousing herself from her reverie.

"Yes; I often see Joyce's face, but then I see that in other places, too—in the sunset, in the river, and in the stars; it is everywhere!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Lucy, suddenly, lifting up her hand to enjoin silence. "What was that?"

"I heard nothing," answered Joe. "What did it sound like?"

"Some one tapping against the shutter."

"It was the wind; it is blowing a regular hurricane now, and I expect it will increase as the night wears on."

"No," said Lucy, decidedly; "it was not the wind, for the tapping was quite regular, like as if it came from somebody's fingers. Go to the door and look out."

"What'll be the good; it's as dark as pitch?" he said.

Nevertheless, he rose and did as she requested, taking the candle, and shading it with his hand.

As he opened the door a tremendous gust of wind came rattling against it, blowing it violently back, and immediately extinguishing the light.

Outside the darkness was intense; a great black wall seemed to stand up within an inch or two of the cottage, and shut out all that lay beyond.

Joe retreated into the kitchen, rubbing his eyes, into which the rain had blown; and at the same moment a half-smothered scream from Lucy made him look towards the door, and he saw a figure standing on the threshold.

A woman!—her garments drenched with rain, stained with mud; her hair hanging in great wet masses round her shoulders; no bonnet on her head, and only a black shawl of some light cashmere material drawn tightly across her bosom.

She stood for a moment, silent and immovable as a statue, then flung her dripping tresses back, and lifted her haggard face, which was perfectly bloodless, and lighted up by a pair of wildly, glittering eyes.

"I am come back," she said, slowly, and in a voice of metallic hardness. "I am come back—to die. Don't you know me—Joyce?"

With a low cry Joe rushed forward, took her in his arms as if she had been an infant, and carried her to the fire-side, where he sat her gently down in a wooden armchair, and began chafing her icy hands.

"Thank Heaven! thank Heaven!" he exclaimed, incoherently, half laughing and half crying as he spoke. "I knew you'd come back; I said so, and I knew it, but I didn't think it 'ud be so soon. Thank Heaven, we've got you again—our Joyce that was lost twelve months ago!"

Lucy, recovered from her first astonishment, was removing her sister's wet shoes and stockings, both lamentably old and worn.

"Not the Joyce you lost—never the same, never the same!" said the wanderer, shaking her head, and not noticing the warmth of his greeting. "That Joyce was young, and pretty, and warm-hearted; this Joyce is old, and worn, and as cold as the black night outside. All her youth is gone with her happiness; she has only come home to die."

"Don't say that!" cried Lucy, bursting into tears, and poking up the fire so as to make a blaze. "In the future—"

"Don't speak of the future!" exclaimed her sister, almost fiercely. "What have I to look forward to in the future, except shame and poverty and wretchedness? I won't deceive you by any pretence or false words, hard as it is to confess my own degradation. You shall hear the truth, and then, perhaps, you will turn me

from the door—you who are so virtuous, and who have had no temptations." The last words were pronounced with a sneer, as if the speaker found it impossible to conceal the bitterness of her feelings. "Well, then, I went away with a man who promised to marry me, and who broke his promise. I am an unwedded wife, and in a few days I shall be a mother who can give her child no name!"

It is quite impossible to convey an idea of the tone in which these last sentences were uttered—rage, jealousy, shame, humiliation, mingled with a certain fiery recklessness, as if, deeply as she had fallen, she yet defied the censure she knew she deserved.

"Look at me!" she cried presently, rising from her seat, and standing in the light of the re-lit candle. "Think of what I was, and then see what I am. They used to call me the prettiest girl in the village. They said my hair was the blackest and my cheeks were the rosiest. I wonder what they would say now!"

She had, indeed, changed. Young in years—for she was not much more than twenty—there were lines in her face that made her look fully ten years older. Her cheeks were pale and sunken, her lips bloodless; her hair, that she had once taken such pride in, had lost its pristine gloss, and now looked dull and lustreless; only her eyes retained their old brilliance, but the light in them was more like insanity than reason, and timid Lucy was startled at it.

"Never mind what has happened in the past, Joyce," said Joe, soothingly. "We are willing to forgive and forget everything."

"But I can't forget!" she interrupted, wildly, throwing out her thin hands with a gesture almost dramatic in its force. "The remembrance of how I have been betrayed is always with me—burning into my heart like a red-hot iron, and if I live for fifty years it will never grow fainter. He said he would make a lady of me, and love me, and give me jewels and fine dresses—and so he did for six months, until his fancy tired of me, and then he wanted to throw me on one side, as if I was an old glove or a withered flower he had worn in his button-hole. I had been in a dream before, but I woke up suddenly then and knew the truth—that I was betrayed!"

She sank on her knees in the little pool of muddy water her dripping garments had made on the clean red brick. No tears fell from her eyes; but great sobs, each one the expression of dire agony, burst from her breast, and seemed, in their intensity, terrible enough to rend body and soul asunder.

Lucy and Joe stood by in silence—anguish like this did not call for words of sympathy—and they could only wait until the tempest had expended itself.

Verily, retribution had followed quickly on the octaves of sin!

CHAPTER IX.

After leaving her father Nathalie went to her own room, where she locked herself in, in order that there need be no fear of an intrusion on her solitude. She wanted to be quiet, to think as calmly as she could over the position in which she stood, and which seemed to her the very hardest in which a human being had ever been placed.

Her brain was in a whirl, her thoughts were in a tumult. Two ideas alone were clear to her—firstly, that it was in her power to save her father from ruin; and, secondly, that in order to do so she must give up Hugh.

The alternative was a dreadful one, and a strong shudder shook her from head to foot as she contemplated it. Besides this, no words can tell with what disgust she shrank from the idea of giving herself to a man whom she not only did not care for, but for whom she felt a sensation that nearly amounted to dislike.

Fascinating as Mr. Farquhar considered himself—and as some other people considered him—he had never been able to conquer Nathalie's repulsion towards her father's creditor.

Instinctively she had gauged the nature of the man, and this attempt at a bargain for her

self only confirmed the opinion she had formed. The financier had no more noble guide for his conduct than his own interest, and so long as that was served he cared little at what expense.

To attempt to appeal to his sentiments of kindness and generosity would have been worse than useless when his passions led him in an opposite direction, and the girl felt that unless she acquiesced in his proposals he would draw tighter the meshes of the net in which her father was caught, and from whose entanglements it would be quite impossible for him to free himself.

"He will foreclose. Papa won't be able to get enough money to pay him off, for he has already advanced as much as the estates would fetch if sold, and then we shall all be turned out of King's Lane, beggars," she said to herself, as she paced backwards and forwards, her hands clasped behind her back, her eyes downcast, while her thoughts were very busy with the problem presented to them. "Is it not my duty to prevent this!—to save my father and brother from shame, and our name from dishonour, even if in so doing I have to sacrifice myself!"

But then there was another phase of the question, and one less easy to deal with. Regarding herself she had a right to do as she liked, but there was her lover to consider, and did she not owe him at least as much duty as her other relatives?

"Oh, I cannot give him up!—I cannot!—I cannot!" she cried out, throwing her white arms aloft, with a gesture of impotent despair, as she sank down by the window, and let her head fall on the sill, so that the cool air from without might blow on her flushed face and heated temples; and then she sat still, while one of those silent battles that are unwritten in history, and yet witness as great a struggle as ever took place at Cressy or Waterloo, went on within her.

To a girl of Nathalie Egerton's highly-strung temperament there was something sublime in the idea of self-immolation for the sake of a duty which she had held to be imperative. Her nature was cast in the heroic mould of the Laodamian women of old Greece, and the sacrifice of Iphigenia seemed to her quite within the bounds of probability.

Nevertheless, the struggle was hard and bitter—all the harder because her dream of love was so new and sweet. The cup of happiness had only just been raised to her lips, and, lo! it was dashed to the ground almost before she had time to taste it!

Suddenly she started up, smoothed her hair, and bathed her tear-stained face, and then went downstairs with the intention of seeking Mr. Farquhar, and coming to a full understanding with him.

She forgot, or was heedless of the fact, that, as yet, he had not spoken to her himself, but had communicated his wishes through the mediumship of her father. In her burning anxiety all questions of etiquette were waived, and she was only conscious of a desire to hear from his own lips what were his intentions if she failed to fall in with his views.

It happened that as she was crossing the hall she met him leaving Mr. Egerton's study.

"Will you spare me a few minutes, Mr. Farquhar?" she said, breathlessly, and pressing her hands across her chest. "I want to have some conversation with you."

"I am absolutely at your disposal, now and always," he answered, and followed her into the morning-room, where he gave her a chair, and then took one opposite.

For the first time Nathalie became aware of the delicacy of her position, and the colour came in a vivid flood to her cheeks as she lifted her eyes and found his fixed upon her.

"I—I hardly know how to begin," she faltered, twisting her fingers nervously together, and pausing.

"Let me help you," he said, promptly. "I have just been with your father, and he has told me that he has made you aware of the sentiments I entertain towards you. May I hope," and he

came a little nearer, and attempted to take her hand, "that you will give a favourable answer to my suit! Believe me, Nathalie, I love you, and will do my utmost to promote your happiness."

She drew farther away, and put her hands behind her back.

"Mr. Farquhar, let me tell you, before we go on any further, the exact circumstances of the case, so far as I am concerned," she said, determining that he should neither be deceived or deceive himself with regard to her feelings. "It is quite impossible that I can respond to the sentiments you profess for me, seeing that my affections are already engaged."

His brow darkened and he bit his lip, but he said, calmly,—

"May I ask who is the favoured man?"

"I do not admit that you have a right to ask; nevertheless, I have no objection to your knowing. It is Mr. Hugh Cleveland."

"The artist? Ah, yes, I know him, although not in his capacity of artist. He has hardly risen to any eminence in his profession yet, I believe," he added, with a sneer.

"That is not the point," observed Nathalie, coldly. "I simply wish you to see the impossibility of my making any other than a negative answer to your flattering proposal."

"But I do not see the force of your argument in the least, my dear Miss Egerton," he said, snarling, while he stroked the ends of his long moustache. "You say you love Mr. Cleveland, but I simply ask you to marry me."

She gazed at him in deepening astonishment.

"Do you mean, then, you are willing to wed a woman whose heart belongs to another man?"

"Most assuredly I am, when the woman in question is yourself. I do not pretend that it would not be more gratifying to my feelings if I were the man of your choice; but,"—he added, philosophically—"we cannot have all we want in this world, so we must be satisfied with what we can get. You are young, your attachment to this artist is merely the outcome of a girlish fancy, which will evaporate under the more serious responsibilities of wifehood—at all events I am willing to take the risk."

She was silent for a little while; then she started up, and stood before him, her luminous eyes ablaze with excitement, her lips quivering.

"Mr. Farquhar, listen to me for a few moments. If we were to marry we should each do a mutual wrong to the other. All my life I have tried to be honest and straightforward, and I will be so still. If I married you it would be simply for the sake of my relatives, and the unwilling bride would never be anything but a miserable and loathing wife. Will you not be generous, and desist from pressuring me to a course of action which is unutterably abhorrent to me, which would only end in wretchedness for us both, and in which it is a shame to your manhood to persevere?"

He looked at her admiringly as she stood there, her excitement rendering her beauty all the more striking, and he swore to himself nothing should make him give her up. He had never in his life valued things that came to him easily, but opposition magnified their value tenfold.

"I am afraid my generosity will not carry me so far; by ceasing my suit I should condemn myself to a life-long unhappiness, for I love you, Nathalie, as I never loved before, and the first evening I met you I resolved you should become my wife. As for your not reciprocating my affection—well, I am willing to wait, for I know that in time I shall conquer you and gain your heart."

"Never!" she exclaimed, with energy. "If I live to be a hundred years old I shall not alter."

He smiled serenely.

"As I told you before, I will risk it."

"But I will not!" she cried, determinedly. "Duty has strong claims upon me, but it does not claim such an awful sacrifice. I will be true to myself and my love. I will not marry you, Mr. Farquhar!"

A hard gleam, like that of polished steel, came in his eyes.

"Will you not, Miss Egerton? Then I must use stringent measures; in other words, I shall take possession of the King's Dene estate immediately, for in addition to the mortgage I hold upon them I have advanced large sums of money to your father on personal security; in fact he is completely in my power, and even when he has given up the property will be largely in my debt. Another thing"—his voice sank into a lower tone—"you not only hold his welfare, but his life in your hands. He is suffering from heart disease, and a shock, such as leaving his home, would kill him!"

"It is not true!" cried the girl, in a voice of horror.

"It is gospel truth," he retorted, coldly.

"But he does not know it!"

"No, it is only known to myself and the physicians who examined him six months ago when I wished to effect a policy of insurance on his life. Of course, under the circumstances, the office would not take him; but the doctors told me that any great shock must prove fatal to him."

Nathalie covered her face with her hands, and a deep groan burst from her lips. Her troubles seemed to be accumulating; look which way she would she saw no gleam of light in the darkness of the clouds by which she was enveloped, and this last revelation was indeed a terrible one.

She did not doubt its truth. Farquhar's manner was convincing enough, besides, many little signs she had noticed, but had not alarmed herself about, in her father's demeanour came back to her memory with vivid force.

"If you marry me I shall never disturb Mr. Egerton in his possession of King's Dene, and more than that, I shall add your brother to the utmost of my ability, and money, let me tell you, is an all-paramount influence nowadays," he went on, seeing his advantage, and pursuing it. "I shall surround you with all the luxuries wealth can procure."

"Hush!" she interrupted impetuously, and with a fine scorn on her lips and in her eyes. "I do not sell myself for gold, but for the life of my father, and however much you may gild my cage after I am your wife do not cheat yourself into the belief that a home shared with you can ever be other than an abhorred prison to me. I speak plainly; but believe me, I mean every word I say, as the future will teach you!"

(To be continued.)

A DAUGHTER'S DEVOTION.

—10—

(Continued from page 297.)

Wondering a little at the odd coincidence that had taken Mavis Neville and Beatrice Millward both to the same watering-place, Will Meredith went himself to Bournemouth the next day.

An illuminated concert was held in the hotel grounds that evening.

Strolling about on the look out for the beautiful widow, who had promised to join him there, he came suddenly across a forlorn little figure seated alone in a secluded part of the spacious garden, away from the lights and the music—a little figure dressed in deep mourning.

"Mavis!"

"Will!"

In their mutual surprise each had used the old familiar appellation. Two young hearts went out in swift yearning to meet each other.

"Have you forgiven me?" he cried, throwing himself down beside her. Beatrice Millward completely forgotten. "Mavis, it was cruel to hide yourself from me, to deny me an interview when I pleaded so hard for one! Oh, my darling! that I should have lost you through my mad folly!"

She glanced up at him, her dark blue eyes looking unnaturally large in the small, pale face,

that had lost its faint rose-leaf bloom, her soft, dusky hair clinging like vine tendrils round the blue-veined temples and little ears.

"Hush!" she said, gently. "You were not so much to blame, after all. I know that appearances were against me. I forgave you long ago, Will; even before I heard of your kindly falsehood that saved my father from public exposure and disgrace. Do you think I can ever forget how much I owe you. But you should not have come here!"

"Mavis, my darling! Is there no hope for us?—must we part?" he exclaimed, in his misery.

"We must!" she repeated, with a sob. "You know that I am engaged to Owen Tressider!"

"Yes!"

"But for his generosity," she went on, "we should long since have been homeless. Papa's pictures sold so badly for months previous to his death. Mr. Tressider paid his debts, and prevented us from being sold up by our creditors. When he asked me to marry him I consented—out of gratitude. It seemed to matter so little what I did since you were lost to me. And I cannot go back from my promise now that papa is dead. Besides—the sweet lips quivering as if in pain—"you also are engaged."

"Yes," he replied, sternly, "I am, as you say, engaged to the woman whose friendship and sympathy came to me at a time when I was smarting beneath the impression that you had deceived and thrown me over in favour of a wealthy lover. I offered her what little you had left me to give. It was not much; but she accepted it, and we agreed to make the best of our lives."

"Then came your father's statement, maddening me with the knowledge of what might have been. Beatrice Millward is a noble woman; ere long she will have become my wife. That is all. And you and I may yet have some forty years of existence to drag through—apart."

"You cannot retrace your steps, neither can I," she murmured, with bowed head. "Fate has been too strong for us. Once we stood hand in hand, now our paths lie far apart. Love, dear love, it only remains for us to say goodbye!"

Her voice sounded faint and far-off. It seemed to reach him from the other side of the gulf that parted them.

"If you had only—" he began, then paused, as the sound of voices reached his ear from the other side of a thick clump of flowering shrubs.

"Have you been long in England, Owen?" asked a woman; and the rich mellow tones were those of Beatrice Millward.

"About six months," was the reply. "I little thought that fate would ever throw us together again, Bee. With its usual irony, the meeting has been effected too late to ensure our happiness—to atone for the bitter joyless past."

"They told me you had died abroad of yellow fever, soon after I consented to marry Rickward Millward," she rejoined, "and my heart seemed to die with you."

"I was down with the fever," explained the deep, resonant, masculine voice, "but I recovered. Another fellow in our regiment died. My name must have been sent home in mistake for his. Soon after that I inherited a large fortune upon the death of an uncle. I sold out, and have been wandering about Africa or the Continent ever since. Six months ago I came home with a desire to settle down. I met that poor child, and asked her to marry me, not dreaming that death had, in the interim, set you free."

Sitting there, side by side, in the warm, fragrant darkness, Will Meredith felt Mavis tremble convulsively. He caught her hand in both his own, and held it firmly.

"It is Owen Tressider!" she whispered. "He came down here to-day to join us, and he has met—"

"An old flame apparently; none other than my fiancée Beatrice Millward."

"Is it possible? Oh, Will, we ought not to

sit here any longer listening to their conversation," she faltered.

"We didn't ask them to come within earshot," he replied, calmly, a wave of sudden delicious joy surging through his soul, and sweeping all before it. "Mavis, be quiet. I mean to listen to every word they utter."

"It is very cruel, very hard to bear," Beatrice Millward went on, a moan of pain in her voice. "A joyless reunion after so long a parting."

"And this young fellow you are about to marry?" asked her companion.

"He is an artist, who transferred his affection to me after being rejected by the girl he loved. He was candid enough to make this admission, and I was so lonely, so tired of my purposeless existence, that I accepted him, believing you to be dead. Owen, what have we done that we should suffer a second parting?"

"But for these fresh ties, formed while under a mutual misconception, my meeting with you to-night in the grounds would have ushered in a new glad era for us both. It would more than have atoned for the past," exclaimed Owen Tressider, passionately. "Yet honour forbids their being broken. Beatrice, my queen, I have been faithful to your memory through long, sad years, only to lose you at last."

The music reached them from afar with a faint, wailing sound; the night breeze brought with it the scent of summer flowers. On the other side of that fragrant hedge of bloom two lovers bent forward, swayed by some sudden impulse; their lips met in a long, clinging, thankful kiss; then, noiselessly, they rose and stole away together in the moonlight.

"We are free, thank Heaven!" said Will Meredith, gratefully. "Our fetters have been broken, Mavis. It was a fortunate chance—if chance it may be called—that brought Beatrice Millward and Owen Tressider within earshot to-night—fortunate both for them and for us, darling!"

"I can hardly realize it as yet," she rejoined, clinging closely to him. "It seems so strange, so wonderful, too good to be true."

Then, as Mam'selle came up, full of astonishment, but a little angry at finding them together, Will Meredith made a confidante of her, and won her over to their side.

The next morning he had an early interview with Owen Tressider. It lasted nearly two hours; there was so much to be revealed and explained. Ere they parted, the two men had become firm friends. Then, feeling young at heart once more, Tressider went off in search of Beatrice Millward, after a brief colloquy with Mavis.

"So I had stolen your lover from you!" said Beatrice Millward, when the two women met, kissing Mavis as she spoke. "How you must have hated me, child!"

"All unconsciously I avenged myself by appropriating yours, dear Mrs. Millward," was the blushing reply. "I am so glad, so very thankful that the mistake—if we may so term it—was discovered in time to prevent it from marring all our lives."

"In fact," observed Will Meredith, provokingly, later on, "the whole thing was made square, little woman, by forming ourselves into a Mutual Benefit and Transfer Company, Limited, and I fancy that none of us will ever regret the exchange effected. I shall not. Of course, I can't answer for you; women are proverbially fickle. But you can't have Owen Tressider now, even if you want him; that is one comfort."

A double marriage took place on the return of the party to town, Gretchen and her tall Guardsman witnessing the ceremony from the gallery of the church.

If sunshine, rich, pure, radiant, may be accepted as a favourable bridal omen, the newly-married couples had enough and to spare, glad earnest of the future in store for them both.

[THE END.]

SWEETHEART AND TRUE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"O ! if thou teach me to believe this sorrow,
Teach then this sorrow how to make me die.
And let belief and life encounter so ;
As doth the meeting of two desperate men ;
Which in the very meeting fall and die."

THE very air seemed to hold its breath in expectation, and the trees ceased their rustling in the evening breeze to listen too.

Oh ! the sternity of that silence ; the sorrow and heart's woe with which it was laden to one poor suffering human soul.

Poor, poor, unhappy Olive !

At last the girl raised her pallid-stricken face.

"It can't be true," she murmured, hopelessly ; as if trying to convince her heart of its impossibility ; "you cannot be telling me the real truth. It is too cruel of you ! I cannot, cannot believe it."

"Olive, it is true ;" Stephen answered, quietly. "Rebecca and a dozen others could vouch for the reality of my statement were they called upon to rouse up from the past the annals of a grievous scandal. Do you think there are no letters and papers to prove it, as well as my words ? I tell you I could show you written evidences of the fact ; only Olive, I wish to spare you the shameful recital as much as possible. Do you desire to have your dead mother's name dragged in the dust once more after so many years ?" he ended, in cold disdain.

"What shall I do ! Oh ! what shall I do !" cried the girl, miserably, pressing her hands together.

"She was your mother, remember, whatever she may have done," he argued in return. "When you are in a calmer state of mind, and able to listen to me, I will tell you all the particulars of the story. Not now, because I do not consider that you are in a fit state to listen reasonably."

"No," she murmured, "not now. Tell me no more now ; I could not bear it. I think I should go mad."

"You are unstrung, I know. By-and-by you will get more composed. Another thing, let me remind you, that you could reap no benefit from the resuscitation of the scandal to prove the truth of my words. If you choose to blazon it abroad, which I strongly advise you not to do for your own sake, you still cannot alter hard facts. I speak advisedly for your good. If you take my advice, offered in all faith, you will keep your wretched secret to yourself, as we have done for you all these years past, and let it lie hidden and buried in your mother's grave."

"Yes, it shall lie hidden and buried, out of sight, as you say," she returned, heavily. "Alan must never know—never ! never !" she ended to herself, in a whisper.

"You are wise, Olive, most wise in your determination !" said Stephen, with an air of cold approval, and some relief.

He was playing a game of chance which required some skill ; but at present the cards had all gone in his favour—the luck was on his side.

"I could not tell him the truth," she went on the next moment ; "it would be too dreadful, too horrible, too heartrending ! He must not hear it !"

"Lest you should in the impulse of the moment forget your wise and heroic resolution it would be better for you, Olive, not to see your lover again," said Stephen, smoothly, watching her face.

"I must—I must see him again ! Once more, only once more, to say good-bye !" she broke out in anguish-wrung tones. "You need not fear for my resolution, nothing should make me break it ; but I must, and will see him once more ! Then—then we need never meet again so long as we live ! I shall say good-bye to him—for ever !" she finished, heart-brokenly.

"Very well ; as you please," Stephen returned, quietly.

He saw that the girl intended to do so at all hazards, and thought it useless to set his veto

on it ; but he had gained his point, he thought, with much inward satisfaction, and for the moment that was enough. A worm will turn sometimes.

The other point, however, he fully determined should follow in due course. The girl must, willy-nilly, bend to his iron will. Must and should ! Two most imperative words, fixed by a most imperative mind.

"Mr. Stephen," began Olive once more, lifting her heavy lids in his direction ; there is one thing yet that I have not asked you."

"What is it ? What do you wish to know ?"

"If I am all you say, how did I come to be with you and Miss Rebecca, under your joint care and guardianship ? Did my mother leave it like that in her will ?"

He flashed a swift glance at her with the black eyes—a sudden, swift, suspicious glance.

"Her will !" he repeated, with chill emphasis ; "what do you mean by a will, Olive ? What makes you imagine such a thing about a will ?"

"I do not know," she returned, wearily ; "it only came into my head at the moment."

"It was your mother's dying wish that we, my sister and myself, should bring you up. We were the only friends she had left. You were her dying legacy. We have both faithfully fulfilled our trust. All this shall make no difference in the future ; but I feel, Olive, that when this small grief shall have passed away, you will give me credit for the sincerity of my attachment, and grant me all I wish. I am as certain of it as I stand here," said Stephen, with conviction.

She did not contradict him now. All the light, petulant remonstrance and energy of denial had died from off her lips, and she was silent—silent at the grave.

"It is growing late," he went on, presently ; "too damp and chilly to be out any longer. Come in with me, Olive," and he touched her arm gently, as the girl made no movement.

"Leave me," she rejoined, quietly, "I want to be alone a little. I want to think. I will come in soon. Leave me alone now."

"You must not remain long then. The dew is beginning to fall heavily. Why your gown feels damp already !" he remarked, laying his hand on her arm once more.

"I will not be long," she muttered, still with the same quiet weariness of voice, "but I must be left alone for a little time to think. Do leave me ; I will come in soon."

"You will get cold, and be ill," he said, with an appearance of solicitude.

"What matter whether I am ill, and perhaps die after all ?" she returned, recklessly. "I want to die, I would sooner die than live—a great deal sooner. If I could but die, if I could to-night—this very night—and never see another day, I should be glad to go."

"Dear Olive, you must not talk like that. I could not spare you."

Then he left her alone, and moved back to the mill, over the long grass covered with heaven's tears—sweet dew.

The girl laid her cheek on the soft, cool moss growing on the wall, and stretched out her hands above her head in complete abandonment of heart and soul.

"If I could but die," she moaned to herself, "cease to exist before to-morrow comes ! The terrible to-morrow, when I must bid Alan good-bye for ever ! Life has nothing good for me after that. Nothing but one long never-ending sorrow lies before me so long as I live. Who would wonder that I wish to die, young though I am ! Oh ! Death, are you nowhere near to listen to my prayer, and come for me ? No one would go with you more willingly or thankfully than I."

Olive called on the King of Terrors as if he were her best friend. It is sometimes better for us that these wild, reckless prayers remain unheeded. Sometimes we live to bless the day they were passed over.

"After to-morrow I must begin to think what I shall do," the voice went on again presently, in its soft anguish. "I could not stay here. I must go away somewhere—anywhere, so long as it is far from here. I will never marry you,

Stephen Daunt, even if I am to be a beggar in consequence. You may pretend to be my friend, but I feel as if, instead, you were my greatest enemy. Alan was my only friend. Friend and lover both in one. By this time to-morrow he will be mine no more. I shall have lost him for ever."

The trees gave a faint shiver in the night breeze, like a dreary echo of her words. Just then some one came near and put a warm shawl over her shoulders. It was old Nannette.

"Monsieur Stephen sent me to fetch you in from the damp, and I brought a shawl for you," said the old woman, quickly, with an anxious look at the girl's pale face and dank cotton dress. "It is a heavy dew to-night—you are not quite well. What have they been doing, my angel ?" she whispered, sympathetically. "I know they have done something, the bad ones. Tell me, dear one !"

"They have broken my heart, Nannette !" Olive answered, despondingly. "Only broken my heart, that is all. A poor, loving, broken heart !"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Arcades ambo ! Blackguards both !"

WHEN Stephen Daunt left the girl in the garden at her request, he walked back to the mill and into the room, where Miss Rebecca sat awaiting the course of events. A frown had settled upon his forehead.

"You have been a fool, Rebecca," he said, angrily, throwing himself into a chair. "You have allowed Olive to pick up some lover under your very nose !"

Then he related the whole affair to her, with a good many expressions of vexation at her want of prudence in the matter.

It was a shock to the woman's hard mind to find herself duped ; and she, too, frowned darkly and angrily as she heard about Olive's lover, Alan Chichester.

"The little idiot !" she exclaimed, scornfully, "I did not think she had it in her."

"You should not have thought—you should have taken care that it became an impossibility whether she had it in her or not. It has made it an infernal trouble in my way."

"What is she going to do ?" asked Miss Daunt of her brother.

"For one thing she is going to send her lover to the right-about ;" he returned, with a sneer at the recollection of poor Olive's anguish at the idea of bidding Alan good-bye ; "when I heard of the existence of this personage in the drama, it became necessary to tell young mademoiselle a short story on my own account."

Evidently the woman perfectly understood to what he alluded, for she nodded her head with an energy rather indicative of satisfaction than otherwise. Possibly it had been a matter of discussion between them before now, and I believe it had.

"Yes !" he went on ; "I was obliged to lay the facts before her as a means to an end, for I found her obstinate, Rebecca, very obstinate indeed."

"I feared you might find her so. I think I said it the other night. Olive is a most peculiar girl. What did she say ?"

"A good deal of rubbish, you may be certain. The interview was stormy, rather of the holocaust order ; but it ended so far satisfactorily for us that she is going to send her lover off to-morrow evening when he returns. That is enough for the present. We must not heat up the fuel too high all at once. She must be allowed to simmer down gently after this. Say nothing to her, Rebecca. Don't even scold her for getting a sweetheart unknown to you. Let her be perfectly quiet for the next week. It will all die a natural death of itself. She must be allowed to say her good-bye."

"Do you think she will tell him anything ?" inquired Miss Daunt, not without anxiety.

"No, I am sure she will not. I made it too strong a case for her to do that. She quite acquiesced in the necessity for silence. She will, I am convinced, hold her tongue."

"There is danger in it, Stephen," said the woman, slowly and thoughtfully, the next moment.

"No more danger there than all through," he answered, quickly; "but I tell you she will be as silent as the grave. There is no reason to quake about it. Alan Chichester will go away no wiser than when he came."

"I shall be glad when it is all over and settled, Stephen," she said, again.

"Yes, it will be better for us both, I confess," he agreed, quietly.

"So she did not want to marry you!" Miss Rebecca said, after a pause, with a spasm of face muscles, which, with her, did duty for a smile.

She felt no pity, no compunction, for the girl in any small way ever; and the thought that she had been, so to speak, hoodwinked, did not contribute to kind feeling towards poor Olive.

"No, she did not," returned Stephen, rather sullenly, for he did not care for the smile on his sister's face; "but I intend that she shall, all the same. I am not to be balked so easily, my sister. Do you think I should allow the lovesick, fretful fancies of a chit of a girl to interfere with my schemes? No, no, Rebecca; you ought to know your brother's character far better than that. I am not to be turned out of my path by a few paltry trifles. The harvest is not yet reaped, remember; when I have gathered in my harvest I shall trouble no more. I have determined that Olive shall marry me, and she shall," he reiterated, with forcible expression.

"Hush, Stephen! be careful. Here she comes with Nannette!" put in Miss Daunt, quickly, as the two figures of the girl and the woman passed the window of the room where the brother and sister were sitting.

Olive did not come in; she went past the door and upstairs, followed by the blindly sympathetic old woman, whose heart was full of tenderness for the girl's obvious grief about something, she did not know what. The cause mattered nothing, but the effect was there, and Nannette heaped silent anathemas on the heads of the two Daunts below as she helped Olive to bed, and murmured a parting blessing on her, as she bade her a good-night and left her.

The old woman went down to her kitchen, where André sat munching his supper.

"They are black ones, those two," she said, shaking her head in the direction of their domain; "they have hurt the little dear one some way or other, though she says nothing. But I know it; André, I know it well enough. They have hurt the little mademoiselle. Ah! the black ones!"

And I do think old Nannette was not far wrong in her estimate.

Arcades ambo! or blackguards both!

CHAPTER XX.

"One by one, the sweethearts of love are gone,
And hearts so lately mingled seem
Like broken clouds!"

EVENING had come—the evening of the morrow—fair, calm, and peaceful.

Time would not stay his march for one poor little throbbing heart which, if human hearts can break, must surely for its suffering have been rent asunder then.

Olive sat patiently on the old wooden seat, endeared to her by a hundred blissful memories of the past sweetness, never to be renewed; under those leafy alders, where love had come to her, waiting for a dreared hour, which should have been instead a longed-for time, she felt as if whole ages of pain and sorrow had passed over her unhappy head since that last fatal evening so full of keenest misery.

"I have entered upon a new life!" she had said wearily to herself, as, after a sleepless night, she saw the dawn of another day rising in the eastern sky. "To-day I commence a fresh existence, one of sorrow. My last happy day is over. I shall be happy again nevermore, and yet I am still so young!" she thought, with an infinity of compassion for her own woes.

The hours of the day seemed so long—to drag

wearily and heavily by—though it brought a dreaded hour in its train which should instead have been one only of gladness and heart-welcome.

But it came, nevertheless, in its turn; but before, long before, eight strokes rang out from the cathedral clock, Olive left the mill and went down the creek to the river.

She wanted to have all the spare moments before that clock told the hour, to think over her desolation, alone—before Alan should come to her as he had written. So she was early at the meeting-place, and sat conning over the hard task which lay before her, thinking how to say that sorrowful good-bye which must be uttered without fail this very evening.

The river ran murmuring past just as it always did, and the rushes swayed and bent in the swift moving waters. The shadows fell softly on the stream, and the birds sang their evening carols above her in the leafy alders.

Nothing was changed but herself. She, the only human thing there, envied Nature's calm, quiet peace, which she would fain have felt too, but which Destiny withheld.

While yet thinking the clock struck eight. Oh! fatal hour, you have come at last!

After the last stroke had died away on the evening air, she listened keenly for a footfall coming behind, but she heard nothing—not a sound in the stillness.

She sat with bent head and clasped hands still listening, but Alan did not come. The minutes seemed hours, but she forgot that they were only minutes after all, and time was yet young. Perhaps he was not coming, had been detained for some reason, and another day of waiting anguish would succeed on this, which had been almost unbearable to her. Surely it must be hours that dragged by, not minutes, and the tryst would be unkept!

Then, while all this chaos of thought whirled through her mind, she heard the footfall on the sward by the river—a hastening footfall, which told of loving greeting, and a heart's welcome ready to be murmured in her ear.

She could not look up and see him coming, knowing how soon he would be going again from her—not for a few days only, such as this last parting had been, but for ever.

As he came quickly up to her she rose from her seat in silence.

"My darling!" Alan began, putting his arms round her, and drawing her close to him; "how glad I am to see you again!" and he kissed her lips softly.

His very tone of voice spoke for the truth of what he said.

"I am a little bit late, but I came as quickly as I possibly could to keep time. Did I make you wait for me long?"

"No not long, Alan," she answered in a kind of sighing whisper.

"I thought that blessed old diligence would never land me at Pont l'Abbaye to-night at all. I declare it crawled like a snail. You got my letter yesterday all right, of course, or you would not have been here now, you small darling. I am more glad than I can say to see you agin," he says, fondly, once more.

"Yes, I got your letter," Olive says again in the same voice.

Is it not at this very moment lying against her beating heart? It is the one reminiscence of her love which she means to keep until she dies. That small link she need not give up.

Then he takes a little case out of his breast coat pocket, and opens it.

"I have brought you this, dearest, instead of the one I gave you a week ago;" and takes from the case a ring of sparkling diamonds, lying on its little nest of purple velvet. "It is more suitable for you than the other heavy affair, which was much too large for your dear little finger, I remember. What are you going to give me for it?" he ends, tenderly brushing away a little brown curl from the white forehead.

"I cannot take it," she murmurs, low-voiced, with an effort.

"Cannot take it, you curious little damsel!" he repeats, playfully, not comprehending for one moment that she really means what she says.

He thinks it arises from some girlish scruple or other, or a sudden shyness about accepting such a present. "And why can you not take your betrothal ring? It is only an exchange for that other one which you made no bones about last week. Don't you like it?" anxiously.

"It is lovely!" Olive answers, below her breath; "but I cannot take it."

"Darkest, I do not quite understand what you mean in this. You are engaged to me. We are affianced husband and wife; then why not take my ring?" he urges, tenderly.

"I cannot—indeed I cannot!" she says, with a little sigh.

At the sound of that sigh he turns her face up to his.

"Olive, darling, what is it? What does it mean? Tell me. You are keeping something from me, I am sure!" he inquires, quickly, and then waits for her answer.

But she gives him none, only droops her great brown eyes beneath his, and the pallor deepens on those creamy cheeks.

"You were not like this when I went away," Alan goes on the next moment. "What has happened in my absence to make you so different to me? I have only been away one week, and I find an altered little love when I come back. Now, what is the reason? Have I offended your small ladyship in anything?" looking lovingly at her.

"No—oh, no!" she responds, quickly.

"Then what is it? Tell me, Olive, dearest!"

Once more she keeps silence.

"Have you changed your mind about me?" he hazards again, more for the sake of hearing her refuse such an inquiry with all her sweet vehemence of denial than because he believes for one single instant that such a thing may really be true.

She shrinks yet closer to him as he speaks, as if, though her lips might acknowledge it, her heart protested against the lie on her lips.

"Yes!" she murmurs at last, below her breath, and hanging her head in utter self-abasement and humiliation, "I have—changed—my mind!"

Alan looked at her for one moment in mute amazement. He doubted if he really heard aright. Then he says, a little huskily,

"Say it again, Olive! Let me hear it again, for I cannot believe you mean what you say now!"

"Since you have been gone I have changed—my mind," she repeats, with infinite labour.

How hard it is to say!—how irrepressibly hard! and yet it must be said! There is no other way left to her.

It is strange; the girl does not repel him or loose his arms from about her; and yet she tells him she has changed her mind, and does not want him any longer, in a laboured, stricken kind of way, as if it hurt her to say it. All the time Alan wonders at the anomaly.

But, at any rate, her words leave no manner of doubt as to her meaning. They admit of no misconstruction, and he insensibly drops his arms away from her as he hears them.

The girl shivers as they fall away; it is the first severed link of the love-chain which until now has bound the two hearts in one. It is but the beginning of the end of her brief blissful love-dream.

"What means that you do not care for me any more than?" he asks, most sorrowfully, looking at her with his grey eyes, in which love still shines.

She stretches out one hand suddenly, as if to take his hand in hers, then she quickly drops it again to her side, as she recollects how impossible it is for her to contradict his assertion, and that it is better for him to think what he likes, since some excuse is necessary as an endorsement of her words.

"Is that it? Is that what you mean, Olive? Answer me!" he says, mournfully regarding her.

She droops her head and is silent, for her lips will not frame the bitter untruth which he demands.

Alan takes her silence as an affirmation, and, indeed, it looks sadly like it.

"You are not my dear little love any longer, then!" he goes on presently.

"No!" she answers, in a little, sighing whisper, still with drooping head.

"And you wish me to go?" with quiet sadness.

Lower and lower bends that head as she murmurs at last, under her breath, a heart-wrung, agonising—

"Yes!"

"Well, Olive, then—good-bye!" Alan says, quietly, after a moment's silence, which seems like an eternity to her.

At the sound of that fatal word her heart stands suddenly still in its pain. Is he going—really going—like this, without another single loving look or thought for her?—never to see him again, or hear his voice? It is too cruel!

"Do not go yet!" she gasps out, lifting her pale face to his. "I want to tell you before you go that it was a—a mistake from the first. Do not think hardly of me, for I do not deserve it!"

"A mistake, Olive!" Alan repeats after her, with sorrowful infliction. "Where was the mistake in our love, or rather I ought to say my love, for it seems you never really could have loved me as I thought you did? It was I who mistook in thinking so, I find now."

"A mistake," she went on, drearily; "all a mistake from the beginning. It should never have been from the very first!"

"It can be easily remedied," he rejoins, quickly; "very easily remedied by our saying good-bye to each other to-night. We can then each go our own way for the future, as if we had never met—as if neither you nor I had ever exchanged one single word of love or plighted our troth here by the river. Henceforth, Olive, you and I can be strangers. That is the remedy!"

"You are angry with me," Olive murmurs, in a heartbroken voice, "or you would not speak like that!"

"No, I am not angry. It is no time to feel anger, only sorrow and disappointment to find the thing you prized and loved so feeble in its affection—so changeable in a few short days! I could not have believed it of you!" he ends, rather huskily.

"I am not so bad as you think me, indeed I am not," she says, turning her mournful eyes up to his. "Perhaps some day in the future you will think less hardly of me than you do now!"

He may hear the truth one day in his life, then he will acquit me, she thinks in her desolate heart.

"I shall always love your memory," he answers, quietly. "I shall always think of you as you were a week ago, not as you are now."

"Yes," she murmurs, drearily; "think of me always like that, not as I am now, if you do think of me at all. But I am not worth it, and you will soon forget me. I am all you say, fickle, capricious, changeable as the wind. I should not have made you a good wife. You will marry someone worthier, better, and more suitable than I."

She speaks in a dull monotone, as if taking a pleasure in her own depreciation, with no desire to spare herself in the smallest degree.

"I do not think I shall ever care for anyone so much as I have loved you," Alan answers, quickly, "but I own it is better as it is. If you cannot love me enough to marry me we are far better apart. But it is you who send me away, remember."

"Yes," she says, slowly. "I could never marry anyone I did not—love. I have thought over it, and I could—never—marry—you—ever!" she ends unevenly.

The strain is getting greater than her poor, small strength can bear. If it lasts much longer she feels she shall go mad, or fall at his feet, crying—

"It is a lie that I do not care for you any more. I love you still, better than ever before. You are the very light of my life; in losing you I would wish to die, and perish off the face of the earth. This good-bye is killing me, for I do love you—love you—love you!"

But that must never be said, so she must end this parting trust, and soon.

Then she hears him say, huskily,—

"Good-bye, Olive. May you deal to another man who may come after me more kindly than you have done to me."

She knows that he put out his hand in token of parting amity; but she cannot see it for a mist of unshed blinding tears of heart-wrung anguish.

"You forgive me!" she cries, in a little, moaning voice. "Let me hear you say that you do forgive me before you go."

"I forgive you, dear Olive, and may Heaven bless you in your future!" he answers, softly.

Then she feels her hand taken in his, and, bending his head, Alan touches it gently with his lips in a forgiving and most loving farewell.

In another moment he has gone. Olive hears his steps grow fainter and fainter, and fade into silence.

Her heart moans "Gone!" in an unuttered agony. "He has gone, and I shall never see him more!" It echoes, in voiceless despair.

The river murmurs "Gone!" as it hurries past the rushes and weed-grown bank. The alders rustle and whisper one to another "Gone!" in the evening breeze.

A jay screams, shrilly, "Gone!" in the branches above; and the distant convent bells, pealing the Angelus, ring out "Gone!" Their sweet, chiming peal sounds harsh and mocking through the still summer evening air, like "sweet bells jangled out of tune!"

(To be continued.)

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FACETIE.

PROUD PARENT: "My boy's learning to play the cornet." Neighbour (sadly): "So I hear."

FRANK: "I have been dancing till I feel quite idiotic." Maude: "Really, I didn't notice any difference."

"Oh, Edgar, it's delightful, this being secretly engaged and nobody knowing anything about it! All my friends are envying me for it."

SILLIGUS: "When would you say that a man has acquired true greatness?" Cynicus: "When he deserves his own opinion of himself."

AT THE TABLE.—The Lover: "Love makes the world go round." The Landlady: "I wish love or something else would make this chicken go round."

Tom: "Will says his wife can't cook a little bit." Jack: "That's unfortunate." Tom: "Yes, but that isn't the worst of it. She insists on cooking a lot."

GRUMPY: "Pshaw! Women can never keep a secret." Mrs. Grumpy: "Can't, eh? Perhaps I haven't guarded the secret the wedding-ring you gave me was only nine carat."

"I see beef is firm," remarked the landlord, looking up from the morning paper. "Very firm, indeed," groaned the thin boarder, continuing his efforts to dismember the steak.

LITTLE MABEL: "If I let them have my tooth pulled they give me a penny, and with the penny I buy chocolate that gives me another toothache—and so it goes on."

FATHER: Look here! You gals have got to share that one light between you and your brains. Can't afford a light in both rooms." The Gals (in one voice): "She can have it all herself."

"Do you dance on your toes, Miss Quickwit?" "Never, Mr. Clumsy. Other people do that for me." And he didn't know what she meant until he tried to get another dance with her.

"MARIE, after we are married, what course shall you pursue to retain my love?" "Oh, Harry, I shall spend an awful lot of money on fine clothes, and look just as pretty as I can."

WIFE: "What's that white stuff on your shoulder?" Husband: "Chalk, from a billiard cue, you know." Wife (sniffing): "Hereafter I wish you to use chalk that doesn't smell like toilet powder."

"THESE doctors are frauds. They all say that a good laugh is healthy. I know better." "Been experimenting?" "Yes. The governor fell downstairs this morning, and I had a good laugh. Now I cannot sit down without pain."

SPORTSMAN (to Snobson, who hasn't brought down a single bird all day): "Do you know Lord Peckham?" Snobson: "Oh, dear, yes; I've often shot at his house." Sportsman: "Ever hit it?"

"HARRY, don't you think that is a pretty good straw hat I bought you for one-and-sevenspence at the 'rummage sale'?" "Yes indeed; I liked it last year when I paid eight-and-sixpence for it."

WIFE: "Don't you think you might manage to keep the house alone for a week, while I go off on a visit?" Husband: "Yes, of course." "But won't you be lonely and miserable?" "Not a bit." "Hah! Then I won't go."

"WILLIE, please give me a sentence in which the verbs 'to set' and 'to sit' are used correctly. Willie (after a brief deliberation): "Great Britain is a country on which the sun never sets, and on which no other country ever sits."

She: "We're going to organise a society." He: "What! Daughters of the Revolution?" She: "Oh, no; it's only going to be a sewing circle, with a little gossip if we want it." He: "Ah, Daughters of the Revolution, is it?"

MABEL: "Jack is the funniest fellow. He took me out driving yesterday, and when we were seven miles from home he said if I wouldn't promise to marry him he'd make me get out and walk back!" Ida: "Did you walk back?" Mabel: "No, indeed; but the horse did."

JONES (to young man at front door): "Haven't I told you, sir, never to call here again!" Young Man: "Yes, sir; but I haven't called to see the housemaid this time. I am the water-rate collector." Jones (in a milder tone): "I see. Will you please call again?"

YOUNG REPORTER: "I have been sent out to report this game of tennis, and I don't know a thing about the game." Player: "I'll give you the names of all the players and spectators, and my sister will tell you how each lady is dressed. Never mind about the game."

"You keep me waiting so long!" complained the customer. "Madam" said the worried grocer, who was economising in business by employing only one clerk, "are you not the lady that was in here yesterday grumbling about short weights?"

HOUSEKEEPER: "Has any way been discovered to kill the pests that destroy carpets?" Great Scientist: "Yes, madam. Take up the carpets, hang them on a line, and beat them with a heavy stick." "Will that kill the insects?" "Yes, madam, if you hit them."

TOMMY: "Mr. Y., my sister Laura said at table this morning that she thought you had the prettiest moustache she ever saw." Y.: "You oughtn't to tell things you hear at table, Tommy." Tommy: "But she's going to give me a penny for telling you."

"ECONOMY" said the overprudent man, "is the source of wealth." "Yes," answered the overcaresome friend; "by denying oneself all the luxuries of life it is possible to get enough money to provide them in liberal quantities for some one else."

PENNINGTON: "Two of my latest poems appeared in the last issue of Duffer's Magazine." Inkerly: "Yes, I noticed them." Pennington: "And what did you think of them?" Inkerly: "Well, to be candid, I thought the first was awfully simple and the second simply awful."

FAIR PATRON: "Those morning glories you sold me are no use." Seedsman: "What's the matter, ma'am?" "They never open." "Those seeds, ma'am, was imported direct from China, ma'am, and, it bein' day over there when it's night here, I suppose, ma'am, they do their bloomin' after you get to sleep."

VISITOR: "Did you tell sister I had come?" Tommy: "Yeth, sir." "That's a good boy; here's a shilling. Now, what did sister say?" "I told her that her young man was in the parlour, and she said, 'Which one?' and when I told her it was you, she said, 'Oh, how provoking!'"

OLD HARDCASH: "Yes, Miss Youngthing has given me some encouragement; at least, she hasn't refused me. She says she first wishes to see my family Bible. I presume she wants to make sure that I am no older than I say." Friend: "No, she doesn't." "Eh? Then what can she want?" "She wants to see if you come of a long-lived family."

MISS BEAUTI: "I think Mr. Lovelorn is just too mean for anything, and after all the favours I've shown him, too. I used to go to operas and theatres and everywhere with him, and now, when I ask him a little favour, he refuses." Friend: "What did you want?" Miss Beuti: "I asked him to be one of the ushers at my wedding."

MRS. MEADOW: "I hate to tell you, Mrs. Suburb, but, really, you ought to know it. Every time I've run into the city lately, I've met your husband on the return train; and every time he was paying marked attentions to some woman by his side, and every time it was a different woman. I've seen him with a dozen of 'em." Mrs. Suburb (quietly): "We have been trying to get a servant girl who would stay."

"AH!" exclaimed Growell as he glanced over a bill from his wife's dressmaker; "here's an item of ten guineas for that little border of fur around the hem of your skirt. Now, I'd like to know what benefit that is!" "It's a good advertisement for you, my dear," responded his better half. "Your creditors see it and take it for granted that you are prospering and can afford it, so they don't press their claims."

"YOU have spent years, you say, in South Africa!" said the girl, with deep interest. "Yes," said the bronzed soldier-looking man. "And fought in the war!" "Yes, miss," he replied. "And seen sorties and night attacks, and all such things!" "Yes, miss, lots of 'em!" "Well, tell me what was the most exciting experience of your life." He thought carefully and then replied deliberately: "Getting into a wrong train on the Underground, miss."

"THE other day," said Jones, "an old woman bounded into our office, displaying a notice that we had written to her to the effect that a quarter tax on some property of hers was due. She swore she had paid it. I had the books to prove that she had not, and suggested that she had made a mistake. She declared that she had not, and said: 'Don't you ever make mistakes?' I assured her that I did not, and jokingly added: 'The only mistake I ever made was when I was married.' She looked at me a second and then said: 'No, your wife made that mistake.'"

"GEORGE, dear—" "Don't bother me, Laura. I am reading, and I'd rather read than talk just now." An hour dragged its way into the dim, misty past, and the voice of Mr. Ferguson was heard calling loudly.—"Laura, how much longer have I got to wait for dinner? It ought to have been ready an hour ago!" "It was, George," responded Mrs. Ferguson from the dining-room. "That was what I went in to tell you, but you didn't want to hear me talk. We have all finished, and everything is cold, but you needn't wait another minute if you want your dinner."

"WENT home Thursday night and found my wife ill. Symptoms alarming. Dosed her best I could. Friday morning she was no better. Felt worried. Wife dull and stupid. No life to her. Started for doctor. Struck by happy thought. Turned back. Care complete." "What was it?" "Simple as pie. Just said, 'Too bad you have to be sick on bargain day, my dear.' She bounced up. 'What?' she cried, 'how stupid of one to forget.' In five minutes she was up and dressed and frizzing her hair." "Wouldn't it have been cheaper to have fetched the doctor?" "By Jove, I guess it would!"

A BEAUTIFUL and thrilling melodrama was lately being played in a provincial town in Scotland. The chief actor having fallen ill his part was taken by his understudy, who was talented, but slender. At the crisis of the play the princess—who happened on this occasion to be not less substantial than lovely—faints and falls, and the hero's task is to lift her up and carry her off the stage. The understudy, realising the difficulty of the task before him, hesitated perceptibly. Then there was a hash, broken at last by a thin voice from the gallery.—"Just tak' what ye can, mon, an' come back for the rest!"

ON their arrival at the Cape a party of English people drank the health of the vessel which had brought them safely to their destination. One of the gentlemen who was asked to join in this ceremony replied: "No, I'm a teetotaler; but I'll willingly drink success to the ship in the liquor she floats in." A friend disappeared, and returned with a glass of water. Thanking him, with a graceful flourish the recipient tossed the water off. Immediately he made a fearful grimace, and began choking and coughing. "Ugh! what on earth is it?" he spluttered. "That!" said his friend. "Why, you've drunk success to our noble ship in the identical liquor she floats in!"

FATHER: "This is a fine house you've bought. I don't see how you raised the money." Son: "I am buying it on the instalment plan." "Oh! But where did you get all this handsome furniture?" "Buying that on the instalment plan, too." "Humph! Must cost something. I don't see how you can spare so much for clothes. Your wife dresses like a princess." "Yes, get our clothes on the instalment plan." "Won't do, won't do at all. Suppose you should die?" "I can be buried on the instalment plan easily enough." "But your wife won't have any money to pay the instalments." "Yes, she'll have plenty. I'm insured on the instalment plan—pay every week."

SOCIETY.

ONE of the favourite pastimes of the Prince of Wales when a child was that of sailing model boats.

THE Duke of York held a *Levée* at St. James's Palace, on behalf of Her Majesty, on Friday, the 6th inst., at two o'clock. It is the Queen's pleasure that presentations to his Royal Highness at the *Levée* should be considered as equivalent to presentations to Her Majesty.

THE Duke of Connaught has taken Castle Blayney, the late Mrs. Henry Hope's beautiful place in the county of Monaghan, for a term from midsummer, together with the shooting over the estate. Colonel Egerton visited Castle Blayney the other day, and made the preliminary arrangements for the Duke's tenancy. Castle Blayney now belongs to the trustees of Lord Francis Hope.

THE Prince of Wales will pay week-end visits this month to the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at Compton Place, Eastbourne; to Lord Curzon and Lady Georgiana Curzon at Woodlands, near Utbbridge; and to Mr. and Mrs. Cavendish-Bentinck at Highcliff Castle near Christchurch. Highcliff is the late Lady Waterford's beautiful place on the Solent, which is rented by Mr. Cavendish-Bentinck from Mr. Stuart Wortley.

THE Duke of Fife has just stocked a large pond near Mar Lodge with several hundreds of Lochleven trout from Howletstown hatchery. This pond was formerly the reservoir for Old Mar Lodge, and is in every way well adapted for a trout preserve. The Duchess of Fife is very fond of angling, and when Her Royal Highness is unable to fish for salmon on the Dee, because the river is too low (as is frequently the case during the early autumn), she can amuse herself with the trout in the pond.

HER MAJESTY has given instructions for the enlargement of York House, St. James's. This will be effected by the addition of some five or six rooms which have hitherto been used for her Majesty's Office of Robes. The improvement, of course, is being made in the interests of the Duke and Duchess of York, and the cost of the alterations will be defrayed by the Queen's private purse.

PRINCESS MAUD OF WALES—or Princess Charles of Denmark, as she now is—has always had the reputation of being the most humorous as well as the most inventive member of the family. She is very fond of outdoor life, and her emulation of the accomplishments of her brothers brought upon her the name of "The Little Tomboy" from the Queen when she used to hear rather frequent accounts of her childish escapades. Among her brothers and sisters she is still called "Harris."

THERE is a custom in the marriages of the Royal Family which is not generally known. Each of our Princes on his marriage adopts a facsimile of his bride's wedding-ring, and wears it on the fourth finger of the left hand—the marriage finger. Thus the Duke of Connaught had made a plain hoop of twenty-two carat gold, with the name "Marguerite" engraved on the inner side; his Duchess's marriage-ring being exactly similar, with the name "Arthur" on the inside.

THE Khedive is to stay in England for ten days, and it is understood that a portion of that time will be spent in a flying tour, which will include hurried visits to Birmingham, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. The Khedive will be "received" formally at Windsor Castle by the Queen, and it is expected that he will be invited to dine and sleep, and that a big dinner will be given by Her Majesty in the State dining-room. The Khedive is scarcely eligible for the Garter, and as he has already received the first-class of the Bath, it is probable that the Queen will give him the Royal Victorian Order. He is to be accompanied to England by his brother Prince Mehmet Ali, who has been staying in Paris for some time.

STATISTICS.

A SINGLE journal in Paris causes the destruction of 120,000 trees a year as material for paper.

CUBA is the greatest sugar-producing country in the world, and its normal crop is about 1,000,000 tons.

LONDON has 6,102 physicians, the provinces 15,704; Wales, 1,127; Scotland, 8,462; Ireland, 2,559.

THE brain of a tame rabbit weighs less for its size than the brain of any other known creature—much less than that of a wild rabbit.

THE death-rate of the world is sixty-seven and the birth-rate seventy a minute, and this seeming high percentage of gain is sufficient to give a net increase in population each year of 1,200,000.

GEMS.

THE report of the minority voice in the heart should always be given a hearing.

THE individual who climbs to fame and fortune over the shoulders of others must look down on their hatred.

THE moral courage that will face obloquy in a good cause is much a rarer gift than the bodily valour that will confront death in a bad one.

MENTAL differences are legion. No two minds run in the same channels, or think exactly each other's thoughts. Truth is many-sided, and multitudes of men and women stand still viewing continually but one of her phases. Did they but move around her, changing their respective attitudes, they would appreciate one another far better.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

ANCHOVY TOAST.—Ingredients: Four anchovies, a round of bread for each person, two raw yolks of egg, three-quarters of an ounce of butter. Take four tinned or bottled anchovies, wipe them quite free from oil, and remove their bones, then rub them through a hair-sieve. Beat up the yolks and mix them with the anchovies. Now cut out the rounds of bread about the size of the top of a tumbler. Fry them in boiling fat till a golden brown. Drain on paper, and keep them hot. Melt the butter in a pan, but do not let it boil, then add the anchovy and eggs to it, and put it over a slow fire, stirring it gently till it is quite hot and thickens, but do not let it boil. Spread it on the rounds of bread, and serve very hot.

SAVOYER MEAT CAKE.—The following ingredients will make a small cake, and can be increased according to the size required. Half-pound of cold meat, one shallot, two ounces of breadcrumbs, two eggs, one ounce of butter or dripping, half-teaspoonful of stock or gravy, plenty of chopped parsley and some brown crumbs, dripping, pepper, and salt. Mince the meat very finely, and free it from all skin and gristle, season it rather highly. Peel the shallot (an onion will do nearly as well), mince it also and fry a little in dripping with a teaspoonful of the parsley. Add this to the meat with the gravy, and the eggs well beaten. Get a round cake tin, which will just hold the mixture, grease it well with dripping, and sprinkle thickly with the brown crumbs and chopped parsley. Turn the meat into it, cover the top with a plate or some thick paper, and bake about forty minutes in a moderate oven. Turn it out for serving, and pour a little gravy round it in the dish. A few button mushrooms may be fried and used as garnish; instead of the gravy, tomato sauce can be poured round and over the cake.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Chicago has a bird hospital, the only one of its kind in the world, where sick and wounded birds are received and cared for.

THE first use made of fireships in war by the British was during the engagement with the Spanish Armada in July, 1588.

THE most extensive cemetery in Europe is that at Rome, in which over 6,000,000 human beings have been interred.

WRENS of a species unknown to botanists have been grown in Belgium from soil brought up from the bottom of a coal mine 360 feet beneath the surface.

RECENT studies of the ocean bottom near the coast-line of continents have shown that rivers of considerable size sometimes enter the sea beneath the surface.

ACCORDING to the ancient practice of Oriental monarchs, the Chinese Emperor rewards those who bring him good news, and punishes those who bring bad news.

AMONG the Tartars, if the wife is ill-treated, she complains to the magistrate, who, attended by the principal people, accompanies her to the house and pronounces a divorce.

IN the cocoanut palms of the Philippine Islands small pearls have been found, which, like the true pearls, are composed of carbonate of lime. Opals have also been found in the joints of the bamboo.

MEDICAL authorities believe that a given quantity of sugar is necessary to health, especially if a person is energetic. It is claimed that no substance restores muscular waste so quickly as sugar.

THE tonnage of the whole mercantile steam marine of Russia, Japan, or Holland does not equal the tonnage of the merchant vessels taken over by the English Government as transports.

AT Pompeii a mosaic life-size portrait of a woman, the first antique portrait in mosaic ever discovered, has been found. The workmanship is so fine that it is difficult to discern that it is not a painting.

THE Chinese emblem of the dragon consists of a five-clawed Imperial dragon, suspended by a yellow ribbon, and has the following inscription in Chinese characters: "Before it the lion turns pale and the tiger is silent."

THE shells of birds' eggs, especially the light colours, are apt to fade on exposure in museums to too great sunlight. By experiment the darker coloured eggs of olive-brown or chocolate have been found to undergo little change.

BUTTER is now preserved in France by varnishing it. The varnish is very strong syrup, which is applied warm. The heat melts the surface of the butter, which mingle with the syrup. The latter sets very rapidly, and covers the butter with a crystalline layer.

THE latest application of electricity for use aboard ship is a patent inclinometer, designed to register the exact roll or list to port or starboard of a vessel at sea or in harbour. It is claimed that this instrument is extremely sensitive and absolutely unerring in its indications.

THE regular army of China is said to consist of 323,000 men. Besides this, the Emperor's army, there is a national army of 650,000 men, who are paid about 5s. a month. The cavalry receive about 15s. a month, feed their own horses, and if they are lost or killed are required to replace them out of their pay.

To those who have never considered the subject it might appear that each letter is of equal importance in the formation of words; but the relative proportions required in the English language are these: "a, 85; b, 16; c, 30; d, 44; e, 120; f, 25; g, 17; h, 64; i, 80; j, 4; k, 1, 40; m, 30; n, 80; o, 80; p, 17; q, 5; r, 62; s, 80; t, 90; u, 34; v, 12; w, 20; x, 4; y, 20; z, 2. It is this knowledge of how frequently one letter is used compared with others that enables cryptogram readers to unravel so many mysteries.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. R.—Write to the War Office.

L. B.—It is simply a piece of bread.

G. B.—Certainly you have had exceptional luck.

JEFF.—It is impossible to tell from a rough sketch.

BOB.—Johannesburg is 1,014 miles distant from Cape-town.

FRANK.—If you gave them to your wife she can keep them.

IGNORANT.—"Pathognomonic" means indicative of disease.

DUBIOUS.—You would be wise to adopt what is customary.

S. G.—You must obtain a license by deed. Consult a solicitor.

GRALD.—We never advise in cases of the kind. Consult a solicitor.

HAL.—The reverse at Majuba Hill occurred on February 27th, 1881.

QUEEREST.—Yes, they have been extensively advertised; any bootmaker will tell you.

A. F.—Nickel-plating requires an electric battery; the process is quite beyond you.

ANNA.—You may open a private day school without holding a certificate of any kind.

CONSTANT READER.—A Lieutenant-general in the Army ranks higher than a major-general.

GEORGE.—Apply personally at the shipping offices. There is usually a demand for boys.

A. R.—The deed must be drawn up by a lawyer; the cost should not be very considerable.

CLAUDE.—A child is born with the nationality of its parents wherever its birth takes place.

D. R.—We cannot pretend to settle such a bet. Bets should be referred to expert authorities.

MAT.—Rub a small piece of carbonate of soda, say the size of a filbert kernel, in the boiling water.

Puzzled.—We believe that the local pronunciation is "Maf-e-king" with the accent on the first syllable.

OLD READER.—You will doubtless be able to get the information you seek by inquiry at the Horse Guards.

WORRIED.—The conditions are due to the general state of your health. You should consult a physician.

P. S.—You can prevent them trespassing on your property. Apply to a magistrate or Justice of the Peace.

AMBITIOUS.—If a leading publisher will undertake to have your manuscript read that is all you can expect.

BRAT.—There are several, but we cannot recommend one above another. Consult one of the large general booksellers.

ANXIOUS.—As the workman was injured while doing something against rule, no compensation is due to him from any source.

M. G.—If the father dies a widower, and leaves no will, his sons and daughters would be entitled to equal shares of his money and goods.

FAIR.—If you inquire at your local post-office you will be given a pamphlet containing full information with regard to joining the Army.

K. B.—Saturn is the sixth planet, reckoning outward from the sun, the next beyond Jupiter. Its average distance from us is nearly 800,000,000 miles.

GRUMBLER.—Golding means hardship and often short-commons. So long as you are alive and well you must be content with occasional short rations.

ELMER.—Ammonia is the best agent to use for getting out the stain, but if the stain is old nothing is likely to remove it as it has probably become a permanent dye.

H. O.—If young man on joining Army says he is eighteen and looks it, the authorities will not release him on subsequently discovering that he is under age.

BESS.—An easy way to do this is to put a spoonful of salt into the decanter, moisten with vinegar, shake till all stains are removed, then rinse in clean cold water.

H. B.—Nothing short of the reconstruction of a building can do away with an echo when once it is there, though heavy hangings and curtains might deaden it a little.

H. S.—An area a mile square is one measuring a mile in each direction—length and breadth. A "square mile" would be an area covering 640 acres, independent of the shape of the area.

ANNE.—Wash it off occasionally with a cloth wrung out of lukewarm water. Let nearly dry, then rub a very little castor-oil well in. Clean next day in the usual way. Leather or kid that is cracked with blacking is likely to crack and go in holes.

F. R.—A very good recipe is as follows:—The white of two eggs, one tablespoonful of spirits of wine, two large lumps of sugar, and as much finely powdered ivory-black as will give the blackness and consistency required. This is laid on softly with a sponge, and afterwards polished with a soft cloth.

B. R.—If your wife leaves you without very good cause, and refuses to return to your home on being asked to do so, she would be unable to obtain a separation order, or order for maintenance.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—Alma Mater is Latin, and means a nourishing mother. It is a term applied to a university by those who have studied at it, to distinguish it from inferior schools of learning.

Mrs.—Mix prepared chalk or whiting and cold water till it is as thick as a thin cream. Add a few drops of ammonia, rub this over the mirrors with a clean cloth, and polish first with a soft duster and then with newspaper.

H. E.—You can do it very cheaply by dissolving in a little hot water as much Epsom salts as the water will absorb. Paint this over the window while hot, and when dry you will have a very fair imitation of ground-glass.

AGREE.—Boil some potatoes in their skins; when cold peel them, and cut them in slices a quarter of an inch thick, and fry them in beef dripping a nice delicate brown; when done take them out with a slice to drain any grease from them, and serve piled high on a hot dish.

ADA.—Fill with cold water, add chloride of lime in the proportion of one teaspoonful to half a gallon, and boil till all traces of stain are removed. If you keep a solution of chloride of lime bottled ready for use, a little of that used in the same proportion will do equally well.

YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.—Asparagus and peas, early vegetables, which have a delicate flavour of their own, are not improved by being smothered in sauce. Only a little salt and butter should be allowed to dress them. Strongly and unpleasant flavoured vegetables however, like carrots, onions, turnips, and cauliflower, are improved by being served with sauce.

THE MOTHER'S PRAYER.

STARTING forth on life's rough way,

Father, guide them;

Oh, we know not what of harm

May befall them!

Neath the shadow of Thy wing,

Father, hide them;

Waking, sleeping, Lord, we pray,

Go beside them.

When in prayer they cry to Thee,

Do thou hear them;

From the stains of sin and shame

Do Thou clear them;

'Mid the quicksands and the rocks

Do Thou steer them;

In temptation, trial, grief,

Be Thou near them.

Unto Thee we give them up,

Lord, receive them;

In the world we know must be

Much to grieve them,

Many striving oft and strong

To deserve them;

Trustful in Thy hands of love

We must leave them.

BEN.—Under ordinary circumstances passports are not required on the Continent, and two Englishmen traveling for pleasure through France and Belgium would not require one. At the same time passports may be useful in case of dispute with officials; they are to be obtained through the consuls at home of the countries to be visited.

MARGERY.—Grease or varnish can be removed from old floors or wood with lye, well washed out, and then washed over with vinegar. After the stain has been applied, the floor should have one or more coats of filler, the number depending on how much the grain has been raised. After rubbing with sandpaper it can then be waxed or finished with shellac.

DISTRESSED EVA.—The real cure for violent blushing is to practice self-control; you are much more likely to aggravate the ailment by taking drugs than to cure it; if you would systematically study what you are to do and say on meeting people or being in certain situations, you would not then be taken by surprise, and need never hesitate or blush when spoken to in company.

GARRETT.—Place them before they have time to wither between sheets of drying paper. Spread the flowers out in as natural a way as possible with neither leaves nor petals crumpled. Lay on the top of them several sheets of drying paper, then more flowers, putting a stout board over all and heavy weights. The paper must be changed several times each day.

LILLIAN.—Wash at home in warm soft water in which you have made a good lather of soap. Let them soak for an hour without rubbing them; roll in a cloth till nearly dry, and iron with a thick flannel over the stockings. Where the colour might be likely to run, put a little common salt or an ox-gall in the water before starting on the stockings.

MARY.—Wash and wipe the fish dry, then put them upon a well-buttered plate (not on a tin), pepper and salt each fish, and throw little dice-shaped pieces of butter over them. Set in a quick oven; when the fish are of a good colour they are ready. Arrange them upon a hot dish covered with an ornamental paper, and send to the table very hot. Simply serve with lemon and cayenne.

F. W.—There are several ways of loosening glass-stoppers of decanters and bottles. One is to stand the bottle in hot water, another is to drop a little oil with a feather between the stopper and the decanter and stand it near the fire. After a little time strike the stopper gently with a piece of wood on all sides, and if it does not move, repeat the process. A strip of flannel or wool wound around the neck of the bottle and snarled backward and forward to produce friction will sometimes loosen stoppers.

LOUIE.—Before washing white chiffon it should be steeped for some hours, like other white things, adding one teaspoonful of dissolved borax to each quart of the steeping water. The chiffon should be gently squeezed and carefully washed in soap lather. It may be stiffened with either very thin boiled starch or with gum water adding one or two teaspoonfuls of gum water to each quartful of water. Chiffon should be ironed on the wrong side, first with a cloth over it, and then without.

MOLLY.—Your canary is doubtless afflicted with bird vermin. To banish them, first of all remove the bird and seal the cage well with boiling water to kill the insects secreted in the cavities, and dry in the open air. When you replace the bird, at night cover the cage with a clean white cloth. In the morning you will find it more or less covered with tiny red insects or mites, which are the cause of all the trouble. The cloth should be burned at once, and replaced with a fresh one every night as long as any of the mites remain.

OLIVE.—The greasy appearance is best removed with benzine collas slightly diluted with water; but first a strong shaking, brushing, and, if necessary, a good beating should be given to remove all loose dust. If there still remains a greasy soil, you might make a mixture of stale breadcrumbs and finely powdered and sifted chalk in equal quantities, and with a piece of flannel to assist you, rub the mixture carefully over every inch of the garment, finally brushing it free from the powders, which must not, of course, be used till it has quite dried after the benzine.

F. G.—First wash the top of the cane seat well, using a brush for the purpose, a nail brush answers capitally, let the water be hot; dissolve a little washing soda in it and use plenty of soap; having scrubbed the top of the cane, turn it upside down and scrub the under side in the same way, raising a good lather to work off the dirt, then wash off well with plenty of clean, hot water. Should the seats have sunk in a little, as they are apt to do, you will find the hot water will stiffen them up quite straight again, as well as clean them. Stand them to dry in a warm room or out in the sun. The woodwork may require to be re-varnished, if it should also need cleansing.

G. N.—Conclave is the name given to the assembly of cardinals met together for the purpose of electing a Pope, and is also applied to the place in which they meet with that object. The conclave is usually held in the Vatican, where on the day after the funeral of the deceased pontiff they all assemble, and after the regulations that relate to the conclave have been read they are locked up in separate apartments and kept under strict surveillance until the election has taken place. They meet once a day in the chapel of the palace, where a scrutiny is made of their votes, and this is repeated every day until at least two-thirds of the votes are in favour of one individual, who is then considered duly elected to the pontifical chair.

FAIRYLOGY.—Left upper corner, upright, "Good-bye-sweetheart, good-bye"; reversed, "I love you"; diagonally, "My heart is another's"; side, "Have you ever a lover dangling after you?" Right upper corner, upright, nothing (being the orthodox and sensible manner of stamping a letter); reversed, "Write no more"; diagonally, "Do you love me?"; side, "Gentle sir, my heart is full of love and free"; Right lower corner, upright, "I wish your friendship"; reversed, "May I call and see you?"; diagonally, "I might learn to"; side, "I am sincere". Left lower corner, upright, "The coat is clear"; reversed, "I fear to trust you?"; side, "You are too bold." Centre at top, upright, "Yes"; reversed, "No"; diagonally, "My heart has long been yours"; diagonally, "Darling, have you money?"; side, "I talk too much and say too little"; Centre, right side, upright, "I'll tell you some other time"; reversed, "I cannot trifle, show that you are in earnest"; diagonally, "I cannot give you up"; side, "I may change my mind." Centre, "I long to see you?"; side, "I entreat you to be less cruel." Centre, at bottom, upright, "No"; reversed, "Go, flatterer, go, I'll not trust to your word"; diagonally, "Go, flatterer, go, I'll not trust to your word"; side, "You may write if you wish."

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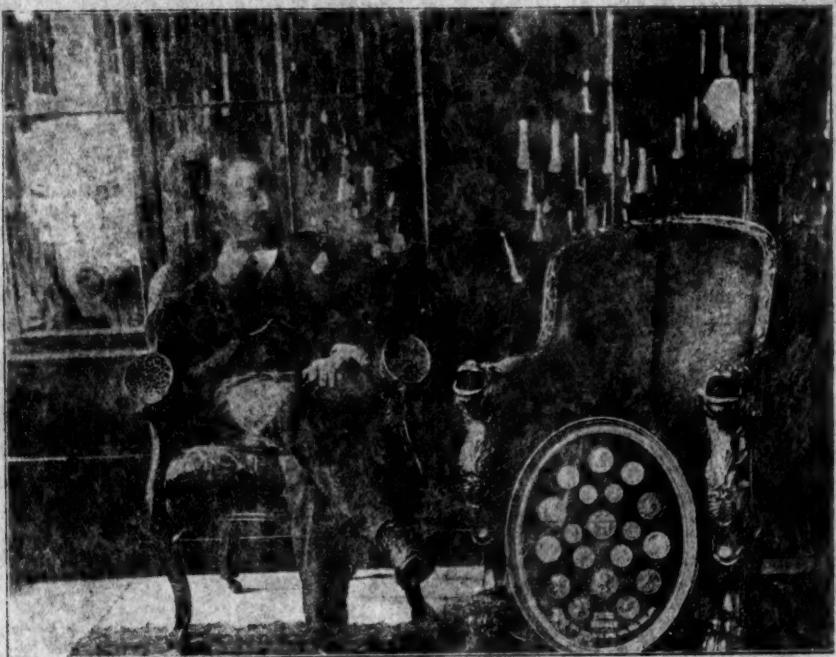
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